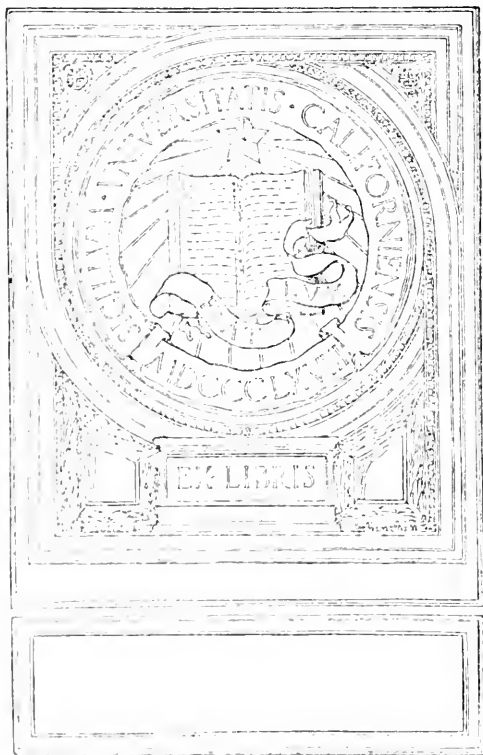




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INTERIM

**VOLUMES IN THIS SERIES:**

**POINTED ROOFS**

**BACKWATER**

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**THE TUNNEL**

**INTERIM**

**DEADLOCK (*in preparation*)**



# INTERIM

BY

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# INTERIM

## CHAPTER I

MIRIAM thumped her Gladstone bag down on to the doorstep. Stout boots hurried along the tiled passage and the door opened on Florrie in her outdoor clothes smiling brilliantly from under the wide brim of a heavily trimmed hat. Grace in a large straight green dress appeared beside her from the open dining-room door. Miriam finished her cadenza with the door knocker while Florrie bent to secure her bag saying on a choke of laughter, *come* in. You've just been out, said Miriam listening to Grace's soothing reproaches for her lateness. Shall I come in or shall I burst into tears and sit down on the doorstep? Florrie laughed aloud, standing with the bag. Bring her *in* scolded Mrs. Philps from the dining-room door. Grace took her by the arm and drew her along the passage. I'm one

mass of mud.—Never mind the mud, come in out of the rain, scolded Mrs. Philps backing towards the fire, you must be worn out. —No, I don't feel tired now I'm here, oh what a heavenly fire. Miriam heard the front door shut with a shallow suburban slam and got herself round the supper table to stand with Mrs. Philps on the hearthrug and smile into the fire. Mrs. Philps patted her arm and cheek. Is the door really shut O'Hara said Miriam turning to Florrie coming into the room. Of course it is, choked Florrie coming to the hearthrug to pat her; — I'll put the chain up if you like.—Sit down and rest before you go upstairs said Mrs. Philps propelling her gently backwards into the largest of the velvet armchairs. Its back sloped away from her; the large square cushion bulging out the lower half of the long woollen antimacassar prevented her from getting comfortably into the chair. She sat on the summit of the spring and said it was not cold. Wouldn't you like to come up before supper suggested Grace in answer to her uneasy gazing into the fire. Well I feel rather grubby. Give her some hot water murmured Mrs. Philps taking up the Daily Telegraph. Grace preceded her up the little staircase carrying her bag. Will

you have your milk hot or cold Miriam? called Florrie from below—Oh, hot I think please, I shan't be a *second* said Miriam into the spare room, hoping to be left. Grace turned up the gas. M-m darling she murmured with timid gentle kisses, I'm so glad you have come. So am I. It's glorious to be safely here . . . . I shan't be a second. I'll come down as I am and appear radiant to-morrow — You're *always* radiant — I'm simply grubby ; I've worn this blouse all the week ; oh bliss, hot water. Sit on the rocking chair while I ablute ; unpack my bag — D'you mind if I don't Miriam darling? Aunt and I called on the Unwins to-day and I haven't put my hat by yet. We've got three clear days—All right, oh my dear you don't know how glad I am I'm here — Grace came back murmuring from the door to repeat the gentle kisses. When the door was shut the freshness and quietude of the room enfolded Miriam, smoothing away grubbiness and fatigue. Opening her Gladstone bag she threw on to the bed her new cream nun's veiling blouse and lace tie, her brushbag and sponge-bag and shoes and a volume of Schiller and a bundle of note-paper and envelopes. A night-gown was put ready for her on the bed frilled in an old-

fashioned way with hand-made embroidery. Her bag went under the bed for nearly four days. Nothing grubby anywhere. No grubbiness for four days. In the large square mirror her dingy blouse and tie looked quite bright under the gas-light screened by the frosted globe. Her hair had been flattened by her hat becomingly over the broad top of her head, and its mass pushed down in a loose careless bundle with good chance curves reaching low on to her neck. She poured the hot water into one of the large cream-coloured basins, her eye running round the broad gilt-edged band ornamenting its rim over the gleaming marble cover of the washstand, the gleaming tiles facing her beyond the rim of the basin, the highly polished woodwork above the tiles. She snuffed freshness everywhere. While the fresh unscented curdiness of the familiar Broom soap went over her face and wrists and hands she began to hunger for the clean supper, for the fresh night in the freshness of the large square bed, for the clean solid leisurely breakfast. Pushing back her hair she sponged the day from her face sousing luxuriously in the large basin and listening to Grace moving slowly about upstairs. Seizing a towel she ran up the little single flight and stood



towelling inside Grace's door. Hullo pink-face, laughed Grace tenderly, smoothing tissue paper into a large hat box—I say it must be an *enormous* one—It is; it's huge smiled Grace—You must show it to me to-morrow—Miriam ran downstairs and back to the mirror in her room to look at her clean untroubled face. Don't run about the house, come down to supper, called Florrie from below.

## 2

Have they brought the sausages, asked Mrs. Philps acidly.

Yes, scowled Florrie.

Don't forget to tell Christine how we like them done, said Grace frowning anxiously. Miriam took her eyes from the protruding eyes of the Shakespeare on the wall opposite, and shut away within her her sharp sense of the many things ranged below him on the mantlepiece behind Florrie, the landscape on one side of him, the picture of Queen Victoria leaning on a walking stick between two Hindu servants, receiving an address, on the other side, the Satsuma vases and bowls on the sideboard behind Mrs. Philps, the little sharp bow of narrow curtain-screened

windows behind Grace, the clean gleam on everything.

Christine ?

Oh yes, didn't you know? She's been with us a month —

What became of Amelia ?

Oh we had to let her go. She got fat and lazy.

They all do ! they're all the same—Go on Miriam.

— Well, said Miriam from the midst of her second helping — they both listened, and the steps came shambling up their stairs — and they heard the man collapse with a groan against their door. They waited and, well, all at once the man, well, they heard him being violently *ill*—Oh *Miriam*—Yes ; wasn't it awful? and then a feeble voice like a chant—a-a-a-ah-oo—oo-oo-oo kom, and hailpemee — *Oh* Meester Bell, kom, oh, I am *freezing* to death, *what* a pity what a pity—and then silence. She fed rapidly, holding them all silently eager for her voice again to fill out the spaces of their room — For about half an hour they heard him break out, every few minutes, *oh* Meester Bell, dear pretty Mr. Bell kom. I am freezing to death whatta pity — whattapity.

The Brooms sat breaking one against the other into fresh laughter. Miriam ate rapidly glancing from face to face. What-eh-pitie — what-eh-pitie she moaned. Can't you hear him? Grace choked and sneezed and drank a little milk. They were all still slowly and carefully eating their first helping. — You do come across some funny people said Mrs. Philps mopping her eyes and dimpling and sighing upon the end of her laughter. *I* didn't come across him. It was at Mag's and Jan's boarding house. Mrs. Philps had not begun to listen at the beginning. But Grace and Florrie saw the whole thing clearly. Mrs. Philps did not remember who Mag and Jan were. She would not unless one told her all about their circumstances and their parents. Florrie's face was preparing a question. Then they must have — went on Miriam. There was a subdued ring at the front door bell. — There's Christine shall we have her in to change the plates aunt, frowned Florrie. — No let 'er changer dress. We can put the plates on the sideboard — Then they must both have gone to sleep again, said Miriam when Florrie returned from letting Christine in — because they did not hear him go downstairs and he wasn't there in the morning — A good

thing I should think, observed Mrs. Philips. He wasn't there said Miriam cheerfully—er—not in *person*. Oh *Miriam*, protested Grace hysterically. Oh — oh — cried the others. Miriam watched the second course appearing from the sideboard — she greeted the blancmange and jam with a soft shout, feeling as hungry as when supper had begun. Isn't she *rude* chuckled Florrie, putting down a plate of bananas and a small dish of chocolates. Ooo-ooo squealed Miriam — Be quiet and behave yourself and begin on that said Grace giving her a plate of blancmange. Oh yes and *then* said Miriam inspired to remember more of her story — it all came out. He must have got down somehow to his room in the morning. But he lay on the floor — he told them at dinner — all of mee could not find thee bed at once! — Oh-oh-oh — He had been — she cried raising her voice above the tumult — to a birthday party; twenty-seex wheeskies and sodahs. . . . — Why did he talk like that? Was he an Irishman? Oh, can't you hear? He was a Hindu. They all talk like that. "I will kindly shut the door." When they write letters they begin — Honoured and spanking sir, wept Miriam — they find spanking in the dictionary and their letters are

like that all the way through, masses of the most amazing adjectives. Why did Mag and Jan leave that boarding house? asked Florrie into the midst of Miriam's absorption with the solid tears on Mrs. Philps cheekbones. She was longing for Mrs. Philps to see the second thing, not only the funniness of spanking addressed to a civil servant, but exactly how spanking would look to a Hindu. If only they could see those things as well as produce their heavenly laughs. Oh, *I* don't know, she said wearily; you see they never meant to go there. They wanted a place of their own. If only they could realise Mag and Jan. There was never enough time and strength to make everything clear. At every turn there was something they saw differently. They *are* a pair she breathed sleepily. *No*, thanks, she answered formally to an offer of more blancmange. She was beginning to feel strong and sleepy. No thanks she repeated formally as the heavy dish of bananas came her way. She wants a chocolate said Florrie from across the table. Miriam revived a little. Take *two* begged Mrs. Philps. They're so huge, said Miriam obeying and leaving the chocolates on her plate while her mind moved heavily about seeking a topic. They were all

beginning on bananas. It would be endless. By the time it came to sitting over the fire she would be almost asleep. She stirred uneasily. Someone must be seeing her longing and impatience.

## 3

Miriam lost threads while Christine cleared away supper, pondering the thick expressionless figure and hands and the heavy sallow sullen face. She was very short. The Brooms watched her undisturbed, from their places by the fire, now and again addressing instructions in low frowning voices from the midst of conversation—*Do* sit down said Mrs. Philps at intervals — I've been sitting down all day said Miriam swaying on her toes — I think we *did* half believe it she pursued with biting heartiness, aching with the onset of questions, speaking to make warmth and distraction for Christine. She had never thought about it. *Had* they half believed it? Had anyone ever put it to them in so many words? Giving an opinion opened so many things. It was impossible to show everything, the more opinions you expressed the more you misled people and the further you got away from them—Because she continued with a singing animation; Christine

glanced ; — we never heard anyone come in — although — (the room enclosed her even more happily with Christine there, everything looked even more itself) — we stayed awake till what seemed almost morning, always till long after the ser-m- our domestic staff had gone to bed. Their rooms were on the same floor as the night nursery — Christine was padding out with a tray, her back to the room ; she had a holiday every year and regular off times and plenty of money to buy clothes and presents ; probably she had some sort of home. When she had taken away the last of the supper things and closed the door Grace patted the arm of the vacant armchair. I like this best, said Miriam drawing up a little carved wooden stool— oh *don't* sit on that cried Mrs. Philps. —I'm all right said Miriam hurriedly, looking at no one and drawing herself briskly upright with her eyes on the clear blaze. Grace and Florrie were close on either side of her in straight chairs, leaning forward towards the fire. Mrs. Philps sat back in the smaller of the arm-chairs, its unyielding cushion sending her body forward, her small chest crouched, her head bent and propped on her hand, half facing their close row and gazing into the fire. There was a silence

Florrie cleared her throat and glanced at Miriam. Miriam half turned with weary resentment. — Did you used to hang up stockings Miriam said Florrie quickly. Miriam assented hastily, staring at the fire. Florrie patiently cleared her throat. With weary animation Miriam dropped phrases about the parcels that were too big for the stocking, the feeling of them against one's feet when one moved in the morning. Shy watchful glances came to her from Florrie. Grace took her hand and made encouraging sympathetic sounds. How secure they were, sitting with all the holiday ahead over the fire which would be lit again for them in the morning. This was only the fag-end of the first evening and it was beginning to be like the beginning of a new day. Things were coming to her out of the fire, fresh and new, seen for the first time ; a flood of images. She watched them with eyes suddenly cool and sleepless, relaxing her stiff attitude and smiling vaguely at the fire-irons. She's tired ; she wants to go to bed said Mrs. Philips turning her head. The two heads came round—Do you my sweet asked Grace pressing her hand. — You shall have breakfast in bed if you like — Miriam grimaced briskly in her



direction.—Did you have a Noah's *ark* she asked smiling at the fire. Yes ; Florrie had one. Uncle George gave it to her. — They began describing. — Didn't you love it ? broke in Miriam presently. —Do you remember—and she recalled the Noah's ark as it had looked on the nursery floor, the offended stiffness of the rescued family, the look of the elephants and giraffes and the green and yellow grasshoppers and the red lady bird, all standing about alive amongst the little stiff bright green trees — We had a farm-yard too, pigs ; and ducks and geese and hens with feathers — We used to stand them all out together on the floor, and the grocer's shop and all our dolls sitting round against the nursery wall. It used to make me *perfectly* happy. It would still — Everyone laughed — It would. It *does* only to think of it. And there was a doll's house with a door that opened and a staircase and furniture in the rooms. I can smell the smell of the inside at this moment. But the thing I liked best and never got accustomed to was a little alabaster church with coloured glass windows and a place inside for a candle. We used to put that out on the floor too. I wish I had it now . . . . The kaleidoscope. Do you *remember* looking at the Kaleido-

scope? I used to cry about it sometimes at night; thinking of the patterns I had not seen. I thought there was a new pattern every time you shook it, forever. We had a huge one with very small bits of glass. They clicked smoothly when the pattern changed and were very beautifully coloured . . . . Oh and do you remember those things—did you have a little paper *theatre*? They were all looking at her, not at the little theatre. She wished she had not mentioned it. It was so sacred and so secret that she had never thought of it or even mentioned it to herself all these years. She rushed on to the stereoscope, her eyes still on the little cardboard stage, hearing the sound of the paper scraping over the little wooden roller as the printed scenes came round backwards or forwards, and plunged into descriptions of deep views of the insides of cathedrals in sharp relief in a clear silver light, mountains, lakes, statuary in clear light out of doors and came back to the dolls, pressing alone wearily on through the dying interest of her hearers to discover with sleepy enthusiasm the wisdom and indifference and independence of Dutch dolls, the charm of their wooden bodies, the reasons why one never wanted to put any clothes on them, the dear kind friendli-

ness of dolls with composition heads—I don't believe I've ever loved anyone in the world as I loved Daisy — Yes, I know — we had one too ; it belonged to Eve, it was enormous and had real hair and a leather trunk for its clothes and felt huge and solid when you carried it ; but it was as far away from you as a human being — yes, the rag dolls were simply funny — I never understand all that talk about the affection for rag dolls. We used to scream at ours and hold them by the skirts and see which could bang their heads hardest against the wall. They were always like a Punch and Judy show. The composition dolls I mean were painted a soft colour, very roundly moulded heads, with a shape, just a little hair, put on in soft brown colour, and not staring eyes but soft bluey grey with an *expression* ; looking at something, looking at the same thing you looked at yourself— . . . . . Mrs. Philps yawned and Florrie began making a move — I suppose it's bed time — said Miriam. They were all looking sleepy. — Have a glass of claret Miriam before you go said Mrs. Philps. No thank you, said Miriam springing up and dancing about the room. Giddy girl, chuckled Mrs. Philps affectionately. Grace and Florrie fetched dust sheets from the

hall cupboard and began spreading them over the furniture. Miriam pulled up in front of a large oil-painting over the sofa; its distances where a meadow stream that was wide in the foreground with a stone bridge and a mill-wheel and a cottage half hidden under huge trees, grew narrow and wound on and on through tiny distant fields until the scene melted in a soft toned mist, held all her early visits to the Brooms in the Banbury Park days before they had discovered that she did not like sitting with her back to the fire. She listened eagerly to the busy sounds of the Brooms. Someone had bolted the hall door and was scrooping a chair over the tiles to get up and put out the gas. Dust sheets were still being floutered in the room behind her. Grace's arm came round her waist. — I'm so glad you've come sweet she said in her low steady shaken tones — So'm I said Miriam. — Isn't that a jolly picture — Yes. It's an awfully good one you know. It was one of papa's — What's O'Hara doing in the kitchen? — Taking Grace by the waist Miriam drew into the passage trying to prance with her down the hall. The little kitchen was obscured by an enormous clothes-horse draped with airing linen. She's left a miserable fire, said Mrs. Philps from

behind the clothes-horse — She hasn't done the saucepans aunt scolded Florrie from the scullery — Never mind, we can't have er down now. It's neely midnight.

## 4

Miriam emerged smoothly into the darkness and lay radiant. There was nothing but the cool sense of life pouring from some inner source and the deep fresh spaces of the darkness all round her. Perhaps she had awakened because of her happiness. . . clear gentle and soft in a melancholy minor key a little thread of melody sounded from far away in the night straight into her heart. There was nothing between her and the sound that had called her so gently up from her deep sleep. She held in her joy to listen. There was no sadness in the curious sorrowful little air. It drew her out into the quiet neighbourhood . . . . . misty darkness along empty roads, plaques of lamplight here and there on pavements and across house fronts. . . . . blackness in large gardens and over the bridge and in the gardens at the backs of the rows of little silent dark houses, a pale lambency over the canal and reservoirs. Somewhere amongst the little roads a group of players

hooting gently and carefully slow sweet notes as if to wake no one, playing to no one, out into the darkness. Back out of fresh darkness came the sweet clear music . . . . the waits; of course. She rushed up and out heart foremost, listening, following the claim of the music into the secret happy interior of the life of each sleeping form, flowing swiftly on across a tide of remembered and forgotten incidents in and out amongst the seasons of the years. It sent her forward to to-morrow sitting her upright in morning light telling her with shouts that the day was there and she had only to get up into it . . . . the little air had paused on a tuneful chord and ceased . . . . It was beginning again nearer and clearer. She heard it carefully through. It was so *strange*. It came from far back amongst the generations where everything was different; telling you that they were the same. . . . In the way those people were playing, in the way they made the tune sound in the air neither instrument louder than the others there was something that *knew*. Something that everybody knows. . . . They show it by the way they do things, no matter what they say. . . . Her heart glowed and she stirred. How rested she was.

How fresh the air was. What freshness came from everything in the room. She stared into the velvety blackness trying to see the furniture. It was the thick close-drawn curtains that made the perfect velvety darkness . . . . Behind the curtains and the Venetian blinds the windows were open at the top letting in the garden air. The little square of summer garden showed brilliantly in this darkest winter blackness. It was more than worth while to be wakened in the middle of the night at the Brooms. The truth about life was in them. She imagined herself suddenly shouting in the night. After the first fright they would understand and would laugh. She yawned sleepily towards an oncoming tangle of thoughts, pushing them off and slipping back into unconsciousness.

## 5

Miriam picked up the blouse by its shoulders and danced it up and down in time to the girls' volleys of affectionate raillery — Did you sleep well broke in Mrs. Philps sitting briskly up and superciliously grasping the handle of the large coffee-pot with her small shrivelled hand. Christmas Day had begun, The time for trying to say

suitable things about the present was over. All the six small hands were labouring amongst the large things on the table. The blouse hung real, a blouse, a glorious superfluity in her only just sufficient wardrobe. — Yes, thank you, I *did* she said ardently, lowering it to her knees. The rich strong coffee was flowing into the cups. In a moment Grace would be handing plates of rashers and Florrie would have finished extracting the eggs from the boiler. She laid the blouse carefully on the sofa and heard in among the table sounds the greetings that had followed her arrival downstairs. The brown and green landscape caught her eye, old and still, holding all her knowledge of the Brooms back and back, fresh with another visit to them. She turned back to the table with a sigh. Someone chuckled. Perhaps at something that was happening on the table. She glanced about. The fragrant breakfast had arrived in front of her — *Don't* let it get cold laughed Florrie drawing the mustard-pot from the cruet-stand and rapping it down before her. There was something that she had forgotten, some point that was being missed, something that must be said at this moment to pin down the happiness of everything. She looked up at Shakespeare and



Queen Victoria. It was going away — *Mustard* — said Florrie tapping the table with the mustard-pot. — Did you hear the waits? asked Mrs. Philps with dreary acidity. *That* was it. She turned eagerly. Mrs. Philps was sipping her coffee. Miriam waited politely with the mustard-pot in her hand until she had put down her cup and then said anxiously, offering it to Mrs. Philps — they played — Help yourself — laughed Mrs. Philps — a most lovely curious old-fashioned thing she went on anxiously. Florrie was watching her narrowly. That was the *Mistletoe Bough* — bridled Mrs. Philps accepting the mustard. — Oh that's The Mistletoe Bough mused Miriam thrilling. Then Mrs. Philps had heard, and felt the same in the night. Nothing was missing. Everything that had happened since she had arrived on the doorstep came freshly back and on into to-day, flowing over the embarrassment of the parcels. There was nothing to say ; no words that could express it ; a tune . . . . *That's* the Mistletoe Bough. . . . she said reflectively. Florrie was sitting very upright exactly opposite, quietly munching, her knife and fork quiet on her plate. Grace's small hands and mouth were gravely labouring. She began

swiftly on her own meal, listening for the tune with an intelligent face. If Florrie would take off her attention she could let her face become a blank and recover the tune. Impossible to go on until she had recalled it. She sought for some distracting remark. Grace spoke. Florrie turned towards her. Miriam radiated agreement and sipped her hot coffee. Its strong aroma flowed through her senses. She laughed sociably. Someone else laughed. — Of *course* they don't said Florrie in her most grinding voice and laughed. Two voices broke out together. Miriam listened to the tones, glancing intelligence accordingly, umpiring the contest, her mind wandering blissfully about. Presently there was a silence. Mrs. Philps had bridled and said something decisive. Miriam guiltily re-read the remark. She could not think of anything that could be made to follow it with any show of sincerity and sat feeling large and conspicuous. Mrs. Philps' face had grown dark and old. Miriam glanced restively at her meaning. . . . . Large terrible illnesses, the doctor coming, trouble amongst families, someone sitting paralyzed ; poverty, everything being different. . . . — D'you like a snowy Christmas, Miriam ? asked Florrie shyly. Miriam looked across. She

looked very young, a child speaking on sufferance, saying the first thing that occurs lest someone should remark that it was time to go to bed. Hilarious replies rushed to Miriam's mind. They would have re-awakened the laughter and talk, but there would have been resentment in the widowed figure at the head of the table, the figure that had walked with arch dignity into the big north London shop and chosen the blouse. The weight in the air was dreadful — There don't seem to be snowy Christmases nowadays she said turning deferentially to her hostess with her eyes on Florrie's child's eyes—Christmas is a *very* different thing to what it was breathed Mrs. Philps sitting back with folded hands from her finished meal. — Oh, I don't know aunt corrected Grace anxiously — aren't you going to have your toast and marmalade? You lived in the North all your young Christmases. It's always colder there. Take some toast aunt — — We used to burn Yule logs flickered Mrs. Philps, plaintively refusing the toast. Miriam waited imagining the snow on the garden where the frilled shirts used to hang out to bleach in the dew . . . . the great flood, the anxiety in the big houses — Yule logs would look funny in this grate, laughed

Florrie — Oh, I don't know, pressed Grace. — We had some last year. Haven't we got any this year aunt? — — I ordered some wood; I don't know if it's come — Miriam could not imagine the Brooms with burning logs. Yes, she could. They were nearer to burning logs than anyone she knew. It would be more real here; more like the burning logs in the Christmas numbers. The glow would shine on to their faces and they would see into the past. But it was all in the past. Yule logs and then, no yule logs. Everyone even the Brooms were being pushed forward into a new cold world. There was no time to remember — they don't build grates for wood nowadays, ruled Mrs. Philps. Who could stop all this coming and crowding of mean little things? But the wide untroubled leisure of the Brooms breakfast-table was shut away from the mean little things . . . . . Are you coming to church Miriam? — Miriam looked across the doomed breakfast-table and met the watchful eyes. Behind Florrie very upright in her good, once best stuff dress, two years old in its features and methodically arrived at morning wear, the fire still blazed its extravagant welcome, the first of Christmas morning was still in the room. When they had all busied themselves and

gone, it would be gone. She glanced about to see that everyone had finished and put her elbows on the table. — *Well* she said abundantly. There was an expectant relaxing of attitudes — I should *like* to go very much. *But* — Grace fidgeting her brooch had flung her unrestrained burning affectionate glance — when I saw Mr. La Trobe climbing into the pulpit — Florrie's eyes were downcast and Mrs. Philps was blowing her nose her eyes gazing wanly out above her handkerchief towards the little curtained bow-window — Miriam dimpled and glanced sideways at Grace catching her shy waiting eyes — I should stand up on my seat. . . . give one loud shriek — the three laughs broke forth together — and fall gasping to the ground — — Then you'd certainly better not go chuckled Florrie amidst the general wiping away of tears — — I saw the Miss Pernes at Strudwick's on Friday ; Miss Perne and Miss Jenny — — oh, did you responded Miriam hurriedly. The room lost something of its completeness. There was a coming and a going, the pressing grey of an outside world — How are they ? — — They seemed very well — They don't seem to change — Oh ; I'm so glad — They asked for you — *Oh* — — I didn't say we were expecting you — *Oh*, it's

such an age — — We always say you're very busy and hard-worked smiled Grace — Yes, that's it. . . . .—You didn't go often even when Miss Haddie was alive — No ; she was awfully good ; she used to come down and see me in the west end when I first came to town. — How they like the west-end — Aunt, I don't blame them. — She used to write to you a lot didn't she Miriam ? — She used to come and talk to me in a tea-shop at six-fifteen . . . . yes she wrote regularly said Miriam irritably — You were awfully fond of Miss Haddie weren't you ? — Miriam peered into space struggling with a tangle of statements. Her mind leapt from incident to incident weaving all into a general impression — so strong and clear that it gave a sort of desperation to her painful consciousness that nothing she saw and felt was visible to the three pairs of differently watchful eyes. Poured chaotically out it would sound to them like the ravings of insanity. All contradictory, up and down backwards and forwards, all true. The things they would grasp here and there would misrepresent herself and the whole picture. Why would people insist upon talking about things — when nothing can ever be communicated. . . . . She felt angrily about in the expectant stillness.

She could see their minds so clearly ; why wouldn't they just look and see hers instead of waiting for some impossible pronouncement. Yes would be a lie. No would be a lie. Any statement would be a lie. All statements are lies. I like the Pernes better than I like you. I like all of you better than the Pernes. I hate you. I hate the Pernes. I, of course you must know it, hate *everybody*. I adore the Pernes so much that I can't go and see them. But you come and see us. Yes ; but you insist. Then you like us only as well as you like the Pernes ; you like all sorts of people as well perhaps better than you like us. I have nothing to do with anyone. You shall not group me anywhere. I am everywhere. Let the day go on. Don't sit there worrying me to death. . . . — They always send you their love and say you are to go and see them — Oh yes, I *must* go ; some time — — They are wonderfully fond of their girls. . . . It's one of the greatest pleasures of their lives keeping up with the old girls — Fatigue was returning upon Miriam ; her face flushed and her hands were large and cold. She drew them down on to her unowned knees. A mild yes would bring the sitting to an end. — But you see I'm *not* an old girl she said impatiently. No one spoke

Florrie's mind was darkly moving towards the things of the day. Perhaps Mrs. Philps and Florrie had been thinking of them for some minutes. — You know it does make a difference she pursued, obsequiously collecting attention, — when people are your employers. You can never feel the same — Everyone hovered, — and Mrs. Philps smiled in triumphant curiosity. — I shouldn't have thought it made any difference to you Miriam said Florrie flushing heavily. — I think I know what Miriam means said Grace gently radiating — I always feel a pupil with them much as I like them — Grace, d'you know you're my pupil said Miriam leaping out into laughter. — I can *see* Grace — she drove on carrying them all with her, ignoring the swift eyes upon the dim things settling heavily down upon her heart — *gazing* out of the window in the little room where I was supposed to be holding a German class — Yes I know Miriam darling, but now you know me you know I could never be any good at languages — — You're my pupil — — It seems absurd to think of you as a teacher now we know you chuckled Florrie. — Aren't you glad it's over, Miriam? — — I *loved* the teaching. I've never left off longing to go back to school myself yawned Miriam



absently. — You won't get much sympathy out of Florrie — — I was a perfect *fool* beamed Florrie. Everyone laughed. — I often think now — chuckled Florrie rosy and tearful — when I open the front door to go out how glad I am there's no more *school* — Miriam looked across laughing affectionately. — Why did you like your school so much Miriam ? — I didn't like it except now and again terrifically in flashes. I didn't know what it was. I hadn't seen other schools. I didn't know what we were doing — It wasn't — a — a genteel school for young ladies, there was nothing of that in it — You never know when you're happy reproved Mrs. Philps — Oh, I don't *know* aunt, I think you *do* appealed Grace, her eyes full of shy championship. — I'm very happy, thank you, — aren't we all happy dear brethren ? chirped Miriam towards the cruet-stand. — Silly children — — Now aunt you *know* you are. You know you enjoy life tremendously. — Of course I do cried Mrs. Philps beaming and bridling. In a devout low tone she added — it's the little simple things that make you happy ; the things that happen every day — For a moment there was nothing but the sound of the fire flickering in the beamy air. — Hadn't we better have her *in*

aunt, muttered Grace? Florrie got up briskly and rang the bell.

## 6

They all went busily upstairs. Even Grace did not linger. — Let me come and help make my bed said Miriam going with her to the door — No, you're to rest — — I don't want to rest — — Then you can run round the room — She turned back towards the silent disarray. Busy sounds came from upstairs. A hurried low reproving voice emerged on to the landing . . . — and light the drawing room fire as soon as you've finished clearing and when the postman comes leave the letters in the *box* — Christine came downstairs without answering. In a moment she would be coming in. Moving away from the attraction of the blouse Miriam wandered to the fireside. Her eyes turned towards the chair in the corner half-hidden by the large armchair. There they were, on the top of the pile of newspapers and magazines. Dare's Annual lay uppermost its cover bright with holly. Her hands went out . . . to look at them now would be to anticipate the afternoon. But there would be at least two Windsors that she had not seen. She drew one

out and stood turning over the leaves. It would be impossible to look round and say a Happy Christmas and then go on reading, and just as bad to stop reading and not say anything more. She planted herself in the middle of the hearthrug with her face to the room. Why should she stand advantageously there while Christine unwillingly laboured? Why should Christine be pleased to be spoken to? She thought a happy Christmas in several different voices. They all sounded insulting. Christine was still making noises in the kitchen. There was time to escape. The drawing-room door would be bolted and that meant getting one of the hall chairs and telling the whole house of an extraordinary impulse. Upstairs her bed would still be being made or her room dusted. She drew up the little stool and sat dejectedly, close over the fire as if with a heavy cold in her head and anxiously deep in the pages of the magazine. Perhaps Christine would think she did not hear her come in . . . she guessed the story from the illustrations and dropped into the text half-way through the narrative. No woman who did typewriting from morning till night and lived in a poor lodging could look like that. . . perhaps some did . . . perhaps that was how clerks *ought* to

look . . . she skimmed on ; moving automatically to make room for boots that were being put down in the fender ; ready to speak in a moment if whoever it was did not say anything ; the figure turned to the table. It was Christine. If she blew her nose and coughed Christine would know she knew she was there. She turned a page swiftly and wrapped herself deeply in the next. When Christine had gone away with a trayful she resumed her place on the hearthrug ready to see her for the first time when she came in again and catch her eye and say *Good morning*, I wish you a happy Christmas. Christine came shapelessly in and began collecting the remaining things with sullen hands. Her face was closed and expressionless and her eyes downcast. Miriam's eyes followed it, waiting for the eyes to lift, her lips powerless. It was too late to say good morning. Sadness came growing in the room. Her thoughts went homelessly to and fro between her various world and the lumpy figure moving sullenly along the edge of an unknown life. Stepping observantly in through the half-open door with a duster bunched carefully in her hand came Florrie. Miriam flung out a greeting that swept round Christine and out into a shining world. It

brought Florrie to her side, shy and eager. — Christine taking her final departure looked up. Miriam flushed through her laughter, steadily meeting the expressionless brown glitter of Christine's eyes. Hullo Madam O'Hara she defended, collecting herself for the question that would follow Florrie's encirclement of her waist — Hullo Little Miriam; you *are* happy ground out Florrie shyly — are you rested? — Yes said Miriam formally, I think I am — They turned, Florrie withdrawing her arm, and stood looking into the fire — Oooch isn't it cold said Grace from the doorway — have you done the hall chairs? — No, I came in here to get warm first — It *is* cold said Grace coming to the hearth-rug — are you warm Miriam darling? — I'm so warm that I think I ought to run upstairs for a constitutional and scrub my teeth said Miriam briskly, preparing to follow Florrie from the room. — Grace dropped her duster and put her arms upon her, raising an anxious pleading face — stay here while I dust sweetheart. You can scrub your teeth when we're gone. *Dear* pink-face. How are you my sweet? Are you rested? she asked between gentle kisses dabbed here and there — Never berrer old chap. I tell you never *berrer*

— Grace laughed gently into her face and stood holding her, smiling her anxious pleading solicitous smile. — I tell you never *berrer* repeated Miriam. *Dear* sweet pink face smiled Grace and turned carefully away to her dusting. Miriam sank into an armchair, listening to the soft smooth flurring of the duster over the highly polished surfaces — Well she asked presently — how are things in general? — Grace rose from her knees and carefully shut the door. She came back with fear darkening the velvet lustre of her eyes — Oh I don't know Miriam dear she murmured kneeling on the hearthrug near Miriam's knees and holding her hands out towards the fire. It's all over thought Miriam, she's failed. — I've got ever so many things to tell you. I want to ask your advice — Remember I've never even seen him argued Miriam automatically, figuring the surroundedness, the sudden realization and fear, the recapturing of liberty, the hidden polite determined retreat. — Oh, but you always understand. Wait till we can talk she sighed rising from her knees, and kissing Miriam's forehead. It was all over. Grace was clinging to some "reasonable" explanation of some final thing. She cast about in her mind for something

from her own scattered circumstances to feed their talk when it should come. She would have to induce Grace to turn away and go on. . . . the end of the long history of faithfully remembered details would be a relief. . . . . the delicate depths of their intercourse would come back. . . . . its reach backwards and forwards ; and yet without anything in the background. . . . it seemed as if always something were needed in the background to give the full glow to every day . . . she must be made to see the real face of the circumstance and then to know and to feel that she was not forlorn ; that the glow was there . . . . . first to brush away the delusion ruthlessly . . . . and then let the glow come back, begin to come back, from another source.

## 7

Left alone with silence all along the street, Christine inaudible in the kitchen, dead silence in the house, Miriam gathered up her blouse and ran upstairs. As she passed through the changing lights of the passage, up the little dark staircase past the turn that led to the little lavatory and the little bathroom and was bright in the light of a small uncurtained lattice, on up the four stairs

that brought her to the landing where the opposing bedroom doors flooded their light along the strip of green carpet between the polished balustrade and the high polished glass-doored bookcase, scenes from the future, moving in boundless backgrounds came streaming unsummoned into her mind, making her surroundings suddenly unfamiliar . . . . the past would come again. . . . Inside her room—tidied until nothing was visible but the permanent shining gleaming furniture and ornaments; only the large box of matches on the corner of the mantelpiece betraying the movement of separate days, telling her of nights of arrival, the lighting of the gas, the sudden light in the frosted globe preluding freedom and rest, bringing the beginning of rest with the gleam of the fresh quiet room — she found the nearer past, her years of London work set in the air, framed and contemplable like the pictures on the wall, and beside them the early golden years in snatches, chosen pictures from here and there, communicated, and stored in the loyal memory of the Brooms. Leaping in among these live days came to-day. . . . the blouse belonged to the year that was waiting far off, invisible behind the high wall of Christmas. She dropped it on the bed and ran



downstairs to the little drawing-room. The fire had not yet conquered the mustiness of the air. The room was full of strange dim lights coming in through the stained glass door of the little greenhouse. She pushed open the glass door turning the light to a soft green and sat sociably down in a low chair her hands clasped upon her knees, topics racing through her mind in a voice thrilling with stored up laughter. In her ears was the rush of spring rain on the garden foliage, and presently a voice saying where are we going this summer? . . . . . By the time they came back she would be too happy to speak. Better perhaps to go out into the maze of little streets and in wearying of them be glad to come back. As she moved to the door she saw the garden in late summer fullness, the holidays over, their heights gleaming through long talks on the seat at the end of the garden, the answering glow of the great blossoms of purple clematis hiding the north London masonry of the little conservatory, the great spaces of autumn opening out and out running down rich with happenings to where the high wall of Christmas again rose and shut out the future. She ran busily upstairs casting away sight and hearing and hurried thoughtlessly into

her outdoor things and out into the street. She wandered along the little roads turning and turning until she came to a broad open thoroughfare lined with high grey houses standing back behind colourless railed-in gardens. Trams jingled up and down the centre of the road bearing the names of unfamiliar parts of London. People were standing about on the terminal islands and getting in and out of the trams. She had come too far. Here was the wilderness, the undissembling soul of north London, its harsh unvarying all-embracing oblivion. . . . Innumerable impressions gathered on walks with the school-girls or in lonely wanderings; the unveiled motives and feelings of people she had passed in the streets, the expression of noses and shoulders, the indefinable uniformity, of bearing and purpose and vision, crowded in on her, oppressing and darkening the crisp light air. She fought against them, rallying to the sense of the day. It was Christmas Day for them all. They were keeping Christmas in their homes, carrying it out into the streets, going about with parcels, greeting each other in their harsh ironic voices. Long ago she had passed out of their world for ever, carrying it forward, a wound in her consciousness unhealed,

but powerless to re-inflict itself, powerless to spread into her life. They and their world were still there, unchanged. But they could never touch her again, ensconced in her wealth. It did not matter now that they went their way just in the way they went their way. To hate them for past suffering now that they were banished and powerless was to allow them to spoil her day. . . . They were even a possession, a curious thing apart, unknown to anyone in her London life . . . *dear* north Londoners. She paused a moment, looking boldly across at the figures moving on the islands. After all they did not know that it was cold and desolate and harsh and dreadful to be going about on Christmas Day in a place that looked as this place looked, in trams. They did not know what was wrong with their clothes and their bearing and their way of looking at things. That was what was so terrible though. What could teach them? There were so many. They lived and died in amongst each other. What could change them? . . . . Her face felt drawn and weariness was coming upon her limbs. . . a group was approaching her along the wide pavement, laughing and talking, a blatter of animated voices ; she turned briskly for the relief of meeting and passing close

to them. . . . too near, too near. . . . prosperity and kindliness, prosperous fresh laughing faces, easily bought clothes, the manner of the large noisy house and large secure income, free movement in an accessible world, all turned to dangerous weapons in wrong hands by the unfinished, insensitive mouths, the ugly slur in the speech, the shapelessness of bearing, the naïvely visible thoughts, circumscribed by business, the illustrated monthly magazines, the summer month at the seaside ; their lives were exactly like their way of walking down the street, a confident blind trampling. Speech was not needed to reveal their certainties ; they shed certainty from every angle of their unfinished persons. Certainty about everything. Incredulous contempt for all uncertainty. Impatient contempt for all who could not stand up for themselves. Cheerful uncritical affection for each other. And for all who were living or trying to live just as they did . . . . The little bushes of variegated laurel grouped in railed-off oblongs along the gravelled pathway between the two wide strips of pavement, drew her gaze. They shone crisply, their yellow and green enamel washed clean by yesterday's rain. She hurried along feeling out towards them

through downcast eyes. They glinted back at her unsunned by the sunlight, rootless sapless surfaces set in repellent clay, spread out in meaningless air. To and fro her eyes slid upon the varnished leaves. . . . she saw them in a park set in amongst massed dark evergreens, gleaming out through afternoon mist, keeping the last of the light as the people drifted away leaving the slopes and vistas clear. . . grey avenues and dewy slopes drifted before her in the faint light of dawn, the grey growing pale and paler ; the dew turned to a scatter of jewels and the sky soared up high above the growing shimmer of sunlit green and gold. Isolated morning figures hurried across the park, aware of its morning freshness, seeing it as their own secret garden, part of their secret day. . . . .

From the sunlit white facade of a large London house the laurels looked down through a white stone-pillared balustrade. They appeared coming suddenly with the light of a street lamp, clumped safely behind the railings of a Bloomsbury square. . . . the opening of a side street led her back into the maze of little roads. The protective presence of the little house was there and she sauntered happily along through channels of sheltered sunlit

silence. . . . What was she doing here ? At Christmas-time one should be where one belonged. Gathering and searching about her came the claims of the firesides that had lain open to her choice, drawing her back into the old life, the only life known to those who sat round them. They looked out from that life, seeing hers as hardship and gloom, pitying her, turning blind eyes unwillingly towards her attempts to unveil and make it known to them. She saw herself relinquishing efforts, putting on a desperate animation, professing interests and opinions and talking as people talk, while they watched her with eyes that saw nothing but a pitiful attempt to hide an awful fate, lonely poverty, the absence of any opening prospect, nothing ahead but a gloom deepening as the years counted themselves off. Those were the facts — as almost anyone might see them. They made those facts live ; they tugged at the jungle of feelings that had the power to lead one back through any small crushing maiming aperture. . . . In their midst lived the past and the thing that had ended it and plunged it into a darkness that still held the threat of destroying reason and life. Perhaps only thus could it be faced. Perhaps only in that way.

What other way was there ? Forgetfulness blotted it out and let one live on. But it was always there, impossible, when one looked back. . . . The little house brought forgetfulness and rest. It made no break in the new life. The new life flowed through it, sunlit. It was a flight down strange vistas, a superfluity of wild strangeness, with a clue in one's hand, the door of retreat always open ; rest and forgetfulness piling up within one into strength.

## 8

The incidents Grace had described went in little disconnected scenes in and out of the caverns of the dying fire. She was waiting tremulously for a verdict. They seemed to Miriam so decisive that she found it difficult to keep within Grace's point of view. She stood in the picturesque suburb, saw the distant glimpse of Highgate Woods, the pretty corner house standing alone in its garden, the sisters in the dresses they had worn at the dance talking to their mother indoors, waited on by their polite admiring brother ; their unconsciousness, their lives as they looked to themselves. Everything fitted in with the leghorn hats they had worn at the league garden party in the

summer. She could have warned Grace then if she had heard about the hats. . . . Grace had not yet found out that people were arranged in groups. . . . The only honest thing to say now would be — oh well of course with a mother and sisters like *that* ; don't you *see*—what they are? Her mind drew a little circle round the family group. It spun round them on and on as they went through life. She frowned her certainty into the fire, ranging herself with the unknown people she knew so well. If she did not speak Grace would see in her something of the quality that was the passport into that smooth-voiced world. . . . she imagined herself further and further into it, seeing everyday incidents, hearing conversations slide from the surfaces of minds that in all their differences made one even surface, unconscious unbroken and maddeningly unquestioning and unaware. . . . They were unaware of anything, though they had easy fluent words about everything. . . . underneath the surface that kept Grace off they were. . . . amœbæ, awful determined unconscious . . . . octopi . . . . frightful things with one eye, tentacles, poison-sacs . . . . the surface made them, not they the surface ; rules . . . . they were civilisation. But they knew the rules ;



they knew how to do the surface . . . they held to them and lived by them. It was a sort of game. . . They were martyrs ; with empty lives. . . always awake, day and night, with unrelaxed wills . . . she turned and met frank eyes still waiting for a verdict. All the strength of Grace's personality was quivering there ; all the determined faith in reason and principle. Perhaps if she had a clear field she could disarm them. . . anyone, everyone. If she could get near enough they would find out her reality and her strength. But they would not want to be like her. They would run in the end from their apprehension of her, back to the things she did not see. . . They had done so. He had ; it was clear. Or she could not have spoken of him. If you can speak of a thing, it is past . . . . Speaking makes it glow with a life that is not its own. — There's a lot more to tell you — said Grace pressing her hand. Miriam turned from the fire ; Grace was looking as she had done when she began her story. Miriam sat back in her chair searching her face and form trying to find and express the secret of her indomitable conviction. Being what she was, why could she not be sufficient to herself ? Entrenched in uncertainty she seemed less than herself. Her

careful good clothes, so exquisitely kept, the delicate old gold chain, the little pearled cross, the old fine delicate rings, the centuries of shadowy ecclesiasticism in her head and face, the look of waiting, gazing from grey stone framed days upon a jewelled splendour, grew with her uncertainty small and limited. It was unbearable that they should have no meaning . . . Grace was ready to take all she possessed into a world where it would have no meaning ; ready to disappear and be changed. She was changed already. She could not get back and there was nothing to go forward to. Miriam dropped her eyes and sat back in her chair. The tide of her own life flowed fresh all about her ; the room and the figure at her side made a sharply separated scene, a play watched from a distance, the end visible in the beginning to be read in the shapes and tones and folds of the setting, the intentions and statements nothing but impotent irrelevance, only bearable for the opportunities they offered here and there, involuntarily, for sudden escape into the reality that nothing touched or changed. If only Grace could be forced to see the unchanging reality. . . Oh Miriam darling, breathed Grace in an even, anxious tone. Miriam sup-

pressed a desire to whistle ; — Oh well of course that may make a *difference* she said hurriedly, checking the thrill in her voice. Far back in the caverns of the fire life moved sunlit. She dropped her eyes and drew away the hand that Grace had clasped. Life danced and sang within her ; shreds of song ; the sense of the singing of the wind ; clear bright light streaming through large houses, quickening on walls and stairways and across wide rooms. Along clear avenues of light radiating from the future, pouring from behind her into the inner channels of her eyes and ears came unknown forms moving in a brilliance, casting a brilliance across the visible past, warming its shadows, bathing its bright levels in sparkling gold. Her free hands lifted themselves until only the tips of her fingers rested on her knees and her hair strove from its roots as if the whole length would stand and wave upright. — You see — she said to gain a moment. Suddenly her mind became a blank. Her body was heavy on her chair, ill-clothed, too warm, peevishly tingling with desires. She stirred, shrinking from her ugly, inexorable cheap clothes, her glasses, the mystery of her rigid stupidly done hair ; how how *how* did people get expression into their hair con-

sciously and not by accident? Why did Grace like her in spite of all these things, in spite of the evil thoughts which must show. She did. She had felt nothing, seen nothing. She dissembled her face and turned towards Grace, gazing past her into the darkness beyond the range of the firelight. Just outside the rim of her glasses Grace's firelit face gleamed on the edge of the darkness half turned towards her. Leaping into her mind came the realisation that she was sitting there talking to someone . . . . *Marvellous* to speak and hear a voice answer. Astounding; more marvellous and astounding than anything they could discuss. Grace must know this, even if she were unconscious of it. . . . some little sound they could both hear, a little mark upon the stillness, scattering light and relief. She turned her eyes and met Grace's, velvety, deeply sparkling, shedding admiration and tyrannous love, patiently waiting—Well, — said Miriam, sleepily feeling for a thread of connected thought. — D'you mean a difference about my taking aunt to call, asked Grace with fear in her eyes. — No, my dear, said Miriam impatiently. — Can't you see you can't do that anyhow? — — They've only been there five years, said Grace in a low determined recitative

— We've lived in what's almost the same neighbourhood, fifteen. So it's our place to call first — Miriam sighed harshly. — That doesn't make a *scrap* of difference she retorted flushing with anger. — I wish I had your grasp of things Miriam dear, said Grace with gentle weariness. — Well — we've got to-morrow and Monday said Miriam getting up with an appearance of briskness and striking random notes on the piano. Grace laughed. — I suppose we ought to light the gas she said getting up? — Why? — — Oh well — Florrie will be coming in and asking why we're sitting in the dark — — What if she does? — — Oh, I think I'll light it Miriam. Miriam sat down again and stared into the fire. After supper they would all sit, harshly visible, round the hot fire, enduring the stifling unneeded gaslight.

## CHAPTER II

MIRIAM rolled up the last pair of mended stockings. . . .

She looked at her watch again. It was too late now even to go round to Kennett Street. She had spent New Year's Eve alone in a cold bedroom. Why could one not be sure whether it was right or wrong? It was only by sitting hour after hour letting one's fingers sew that the evening had come to an end. It could not be wrong to make up one's mind to begin the new year with a long night's rest in a tidy room with everything mended. But the feeling that the old year ought to be seen out with people had pricked all the time like conscience. It only stopped pricking now because it was too late. And there was a sadness left in the evening. . . . She lifted her coat from her knees and stood up. The room shone. In her throat and nostrils was the smell of dust coming from the floor and carpet and draperies. But the bright light of the gas and

the soft light of the reading-lamp shone upon perfect order. Everything was mended and would presently be put away in tidy drawers. She was rested and strong, undisturbed by changes that would have come from social hours. No one had missed her. Many people scattered about in houses had thought of her. If they had, she had been there with them. She could not be everywhere, with all of them. That was certain. There was nothing to decide about that. . . . The Brooms had missed her . . . they would have enjoyed their New Year's Eve better if she had been there. It would have been jolly to have gone again so soon, after the short half week, and sat down by the fire where Christmas lingered and waited for the coming of the year with them. It would have been a loyalty to something. But it was too soon to be sitting about between comfortable meals talking, explaining things, making life stop, while reality went on far away. . . . One still felt rested from Christmas and wanting to begin doing things. . . . Perhaps it was not altogether through undecided waiting that the evening had come and gone by here in this room. Perhaps it was some kind of decision that could not be seen or expressed. Now

that in solitude it had come to an end there was realisation. Quiet realisation of new year's eve ; just quiet realisation of new year's eve. One would pass on into the new year in an unbroken peace with the resolutions for the new life distinct in one's mind. She found an exercise book and wrote them down. There they stood, pitting the calm steady innermost part of her against all her other selves. Free desperate obedience to them would bring a revelation. No matter how the other selves felt as she kept them, if she kept them every moment of her life would go out from an inward calm. . . . The room was full of clear strength. There must always be a clear cold room to return to. There was no other way of keeping the inward peace. Outside one need do nothing but what was expected of one, asking nothing for oneself but freedom to return, to the centre. Life would be an endless inward singing until the end came. But not too much inward singing, spending one's strength in song ; the song must be kept down and low so that it would last all the time and never fail. Then a song would answer back from outside, in everything. She stepped lightly and powerfully about the room putting away her mended things. . . One



would move like the wind always, a steady human south-west wind, alive, without personality or speech. No more books. Books all led to the same thing. They were like talking about things. All the things in books were unfulfilled duty. No more interest in men. They shut off the inside world. Women who had anything whatever to do with men were not themselves. They were in a noisy confusion, playing a part all the time. . . . The only real misery in being alone was the fear of being left out of things. It was a wrong fear. It pushed you into things and then everything disappeared. . . . Not to listen outside, where there was nothing to hear. In the end you came away empty with time gone and lost. . . . To remember, whatever happened, not to be afraid of being alone.

She stood staring at the sheeny gaslit brown-yellow varnish of the wall-paper above the mantelpiece. There was no thought in the silence, no past or future, nothing but the strange thing for which there were no words, something that was always there as if by appointment, waiting for one to get through to it away from everything in life. It was the thing that was nothing. Yet it seemed the only thing that came near and meant

anything at all. It was happiness and realisation. It was being suspended, in nothing. It came out of oneself because it came only when one had been a long time alone. It was not oneself. It could not be God. It did not mind what you were or what you had done. It would be there if you had just murdered someone . . . it was only there when you had murdered everybody and everything and torn yourself away. Perhaps it was evil. One's own evil genius. But how could it make you so blissful? What was one — what had one done to bring the feeling of goodness and beauty and truth into the patch on the wall and presently make all the look of the distant world and everything in experience sound like music in a dream? She dropped her eyes. From the papered wall radiance still seemed to flow over her as she stood, defining her brow and hair, shedding a warmth in the cold room. Looking again she found the wall less bright; but within the radius of her motionless eyes everything in the brightly lit corner glowed happily; not drawing her but standing complete and serene, like someone standing at a little distance, expressing agreement. . . . Just in front of her a single neat warning tap sounded in the air,

touching the quick of her mind. . . . St. Pancras clock — striking down the chimney. . . . She ran across to the dark lattice and flung it open. In the air hung the echo of the first deep boom from Westminster. St. Pancras and the nearer clocks were telling themselves off against it. They would have finished long before Big Ben came to an end. Which was midnight? Let it be St. Pancras. She counted swiftly backwards; four strokes. . . . Out in the darkness the dark world was turning away from darkness. Within the spaces of the night the surface of a daylit landscape gleamed for an instant tilted lengthways across the sky. . . . Little sounds came snapping faintly up through the darkness from the street below, voices and the creaking open of doors. Windows were being pushed open up and down the street. The new year changed to a soft moonlit breath stealing through the darkness, brimming over the faces at the doors and windows, touching their brows with fingers of dawn, sending fresh soothing healing fingers in amongst their hair . . . . Eleven . . . . twelve. . . . Across the rushing scale of St. Pancras bells came a fearful clangour. Bicycle bells, cab whistles, dinner bells the banging of tea-trays and gongs.

. . . . . Of course . . . . . New Year . . . . . it must be a Bloomsbury custom. She had had her share in a Bloomsbury New Year. Rather jolly . . . . . rowdy ; but jolly in that sort of way. . . . . She could hear the Baileys laughing and talking on their doorstep. A smooth firm foreign voice flung out a shapely little fragment of song. Miriam watched its outline. It repeated itself in her mind with the foreign voice and personality of the singer. She drew back into her room.

## II

Her resolutions kept her at work on Saturday afternoon. A steady morning's work disposed of the correspondence and the inrush of paid accounts. After lunch she worked in the surgeries until they were ready for Monday morning and made an attack on the mass of clerical work that remained from the old year. She sat working until she grew so cold that she knew if she stayed on in the cold window space she would have the beginning of a cold. Better to go, and have late evenings every day next week, cheered by the protests of the Orlys and ending with warm hours in the den. As she got up and felt the aching of

her throat and the harsh hot chill running through her nerves she realised that anyhow she was in for a cold. There was no room to go to to get warm before going out. There seemed to be no warmth anywhere in the world. Torpid and stupid, miserably realising the increasing glow of her nose and the numb clumsiness of her feet she put away the ledgers and got into her outdoor things. She resented the sight of the bound volume of *The Dental Cosmos* that she had put aside to take home. Her interest in it was useless ; as useless as everything else in the freezing world. Sounds of dancing and chanting came up the basement stairs. When their work was done they could laugh and sing in a warm room.

Turning northwards toward the Marylebone Road she met a bleak wind and turned back and down Devonshire Street and eastwards towards St. Pancras through a maze of side streets. The icy wind drove against her all the way. When she crossed a wide thoroughfare it was reinforced from the north. Eddies of colourless dust swirled about the pavements. At every crossing in the many little streets there was some big vehicle just upon her keeping her shrinking in the cold while it rumbled over the cobbles, over-

whelming her with a harsh grating roar that filled the streets and the sky. Darkness was beginning; a hard black January darkness, utterly different to the friendly exciting twilights of the old year standing far far away with summer just behind them and Christmas ahead. . . .

Inside the house a cold grey twilight was blotting out the warm brownness. A door opened as she turned the stairhead on the second floor and a tall thin pale-faced young man in dark clothes and a light waistcoat flashed past her and leaped lightly downstairs. Miriam carried her impression up to her room, going hurriedly and stumbling on the stairs as she went. . . . Something hard, metallic, like a wire spring, cold and relentless. Belonging to a cold dreadful darkness and not knowing it; *confident*. He had whistled going downstairs, or sung. *Had* he? Perhaps he was the foreigner who had sung last night? Perfectly and awfully dreadful. . . . The whole house and even her own room had been changed in a twinkling. Coming in it had had a warmth, even in the cold twilight. Now it lay open and bleak, all its rooms naked and visible, a house "foreign young gentlemen" heard of and came to live in. He was one of the "Norwegian young

gentlemen" who had lived in Mrs. Reynolds' boarding house in Woburn Place and this was just another boarding house to him. Perhaps the house was full of boarders. . . . She had grown accustomed to the Baileys having come up from the basement to the ground floor and had got into the habit of coming briskly through the hall with a preoccupied manner, ignoring the invariable appearance of a peeping form at the partly opened door of the dining-room. It was strange now to reflect that the house had always been full of lodgers. What sort of people had they been? She could not remember ever having met a lodger face to face, or heard any sounds in the many downstairs rooms. . . . Perhaps it had been partly through going out so early and coming back only when the A.B.C. closed and being out or away so much at week-ends . . . but also she must have been oblivious. . . . The house had been her own; waiting for her when she found it; the quiet road of large high grey mysterious houses, the two rows of calm balconied facades, the green squares at either end, the green door she waited for as she turned unseeing into the road from the quiet thoroughfare of Endsleigh Gardens, her triumphant faithful latchkey, the

sheltered dimness of the hall, the great staircase, the many large closed doors, the lonely obscurity of her empty top floor. What had come now was the fulfilment of the apprehension she had had when Mrs. Bailey had spoken the word boarders. Here they were. They would come and go and go up and downstairs from their bedrooms to that dining-room where the disturbing disclosure had been made and the unknown drawing-room. . . . . Perhaps it would be a failure. She could not imagine Mrs. Bailey and the two vague furtive children in skimpy blue serge dresses dealing with the young Norwegian gentleman. He would not stay. . . . If boarders failed Mrs. Bailey might give up the house altogether. . . . She found herself sitting in her outdoor things with the large volume heavy on her knees in the middle of the room. She felt too languid and miserable to get up and take the small chair and the large book to the table and began wretchedly turning the pages with her gloved hands. Here it was. She glanced through the long article, reading passages here and there. There seemed to be nothing more; she had gathered the gist of it all in glancing through it at Wimpole Street. There was no need to have brought in home. It was



quite clear that she belonged to the lymphatico-nervous class. It was the worst of the four classes of humanity. But all the symptoms were hers. . . . She read once more the account of the nervo-bilious type. It was impossible to fit into that. Those people were dark and sanguine and energetic. It was very strange. Having bilious attacks and not having the advantages of the bilious temperament. It meant having the worst of everything. No energy no initiative no hopefulness no resisting power ; and sometimes bilious attacks. She was useless ; an encumbrance ; left out of life forever, because it was better for life to leave her out. . . . She sat staring at the shabby panels of her wardrobe, hating them for their quiet merciless agreement with her thoughts. To stop now and come to an end would be a relief. But there was nothing anywhere that would come in and end her. Why did life produce people with lymphatico-nervous temperaments ? Perhaps it was the explanation of all she had suffered in the past ; of the things that had driven her again and again to go away and away, anywhere. She wrenched herself away from her thoughts and flung forward to the sense of sunshine, sudden beautiful things, unreasonable secret happiness,

waiting somewhere beyond the blackness, to come again. But it would be mean to take them. She brought nothing to anybody. She had no right to anything. She ought to be branded and go about in a cloak. . . . There was no one in the world who would care if she never appeared anywhere again. She sat shrinking before this thought. It was the plain and simple truth. Nothing that any kind and cheerful person might say could alter it. It would only make it worse. She wondered that she had never put it to herself before. It must always have been there since her mother's death. There were one or two people who thought they cared. But they only cared because they did not know. If they saw more of her they would cease even to think they cared ; and they had their own lives. . . . She had gone on being happy exactly in the same way as she had forgotten there were people in the house ; just going lymphatico-nervously about with her eyes shut. But any alternative was worse. Insincere. If one could not die one must go dragging on, keeping oneself to oneself. That was why it was a relief to be in London ; surrounded by people who did not know what one was really like. Social life, any sort of social life anywhere would

not help. It only made it worse. Being like this was not a morbid state due to the lack of cheerful society. People who said that were wrong. The sign that they were wrong was the way they went about being deliberately cheerful and sociable. That was worse than anything ; the refusal to face the truth. But at least they could endure people. . . . If one could not endure anyone one ought to be dead . . . . to sit staring in front of one until one was dead . . . the wardrobe did not disagree. She averted her eyes as from an observer. They fell upon her hopeless person dressed in the clothes in which she moved about in the world. She was bitterly cold. But she sat on unable to summon courage to turn and face her room. Her eyes wandered vacantly back to the panels and down to the drawer below them and back again. The warm quiet booming of a gong came up through the house. She got to her feet and stood listening in amazement. Mrs. Bailey had instituted a boarding-house gong ! She went out on to the landing ; the gong ceased and rattled gently against its framework released from hands that had stilled its reverberation. A voice sounded in the hall and then the dining-room door closed and there was silence. They

were having tea. Of course ; every day ; life going on down there in the dining-room. Involuntarily her feet were on the stairs. She went down the narrow flight holding to the balustrade to steady the stumbling of her benumbed limbs. *What* was she doing ? Going down to Mrs. Bailey ; going to stand for a moment close by Mrs. Bailey's tea-tray. No ; impossible to let the Baileys save her ; having done nothing for herself. Impossible to be beholden to the *Baileys* for anything. Restoration by them would be restoration to shame. She had moved unconsciously. Her life was still her own. She was in the world, in a house, going down some stairs. For the present the pretence of living could go on. She could not go back to her room ; nor forward to any other room. She pushed blindly on, bitter anger growing within her. She *had* moved towards the Baileys. It was irrevocable. She had departed from all her precedents. She would always know it. Wherever she found herself it would always be there, at the root of her consciousness, shaming her, showing in everything she did or said. Half-way downstairs she restrained her heavy movements and began to go swiftly and stealthily. Mean, mean mean ;

utterly mean and damned, a sneaking evil spirit. She pulled herself upright and cleared her throat in a business-like way. The echo of Harriett's voice in her voice plumbed her for tears. But there were no tears. Only something close round her that moulded her face in lines of despair. The hall was in sight. She was going down to the hall to look for letters on the hall-table, and go back. She paused in the hall. If the dining-room door opened she would kill someone with a cold blind glance and go angrily on and out of the front door. If it did not open? It remained closed. It was not going to open. It came quietly wide as if someone had been waiting behind it with the handle turned. Mrs. Bailey was in the hall with a firm little hand on her arm. — *Well*, young lady? — Miriam turned full round, shrinking backwards towards the hall table. Mrs. Bailey was clutching her hands — Won't you come in and have a cup of tea? — — I can't whispered Miriam briskly, moving towards the dining-room door. — I've got to go out she murmured, standing just inside the open door. — Going out asked Mrs. Bailey in a refined little voice throwing a proud fond shy glance towards Miriam from her recovered place behind the tea-tray. Her cheeks

were flushed and her eyes sparkled brightly under the gaslight. Miriam's glance elastic in the warmth coming from the room swept from the flood of yellow hair on the back of the youngest Bailey girl sitting close at her mother's left hand, across to the far side of the table. The pale grey-blue eyes of the eldest Bailey girl were directed towards the bread and butter her hand was stretched out to take with the unseeing look they must have had when she had turned her face towards the door. At her side, between her and her mother sat the young Norwegian gentleman, a dark blue upright form with a narrow gold bar set aslant in the soft mass of black silk tie bulging about the uncreased flatness of his length of grey waistcoat. He had reared his head smoothly upright and a smooth metallic glance had slid across her from large dark clear easily opened eyes. He was very young, about twenty; the leanness of his dart-like perfectly clad form led slenderly up to a lean distinguished head. But above the wide high pale brow where the bone stared squarely through the skin and was beaten in at the temples the skull had a snakelike flatness the polished hair was poor and worn. — Yes, murmured Miriam abstractedly, I'm just going

out — — Don't catch cold young lady, smiled Mrs. Bailey. — Oh well, I'll try not to, said Miriam departing. They'll never do it, she told herself as she made her way through the darkness towards her A.B.C. He'll find out. He thinks he is learning English in an English family.

## III

Mrs. Bailey came up *herself* to do Miriam's room on Sunday morning. Miriam wondered as she came archly in after a brisk tap on the door how she knew that her visit caused dismay. The visit of the little maid did not break into anything. It only meant standing for a minute or so by the window longing for the snuffling and shuffling to be over. But if Mrs. Bailey were coming up every Sunday morning. . . . She stood at Mrs. Bailey's disposal sheepishly smiling, in the middle of the room. — You didn't expect to see *me*, young lady — Miriam broadened her smile. — I want to talk to you — They stood confronted in the room just as they had done the first time Mrs. Bailey had been there with her and they had settled about the rent. Only that then the room had seemed large and real and at once inhabited,

the crown of the large house and the reality of all the unknown rooms. Now it seemed to be at a disadvantage, one of Mrs. Bailey's unconsidered attics, apart from the life that was beginning to flow all round her downstairs. Something in Mrs. Bailey's face when she said I was wondering if you would give Sissie a few French lessons spoke the energy of the new feeling and thought. Miriam was astounded. She called up a vision of Sissie's pale steady grey-blue eyes, her characterless hair, her thickset swiftly ambling little figure. She was the kind of girl who after good schooling could spend a year in France and come back unable to speak French. But if Mrs. Bailey wished it she would have to learn from somebody. . . . So she conspired with an easy contemptuous conscience and they stood murmuring over the plan, Mrs. Bailey producing one by one, fearfully, in a low motherly encouraging tone the things she had arranged beforehand in her own mind. Before she went she bustled to the window and tweaked the ends of the little Madras muslin curtains. Why don't you go down to the drawn-room for a while — she asked tweaking and flicking. — You'll have it all to yourself. Mr. Elsing's gone out. I should go down if I was you and get



a warm up. — Miriam thanked her and promised to go and wondered whether the Norwegian's name was Helsing or Elsen. When Mrs. Bailey had gone she walked busily about her affronted room. It must be Helsing. A man named Elsen would be shorter and stouter and kindly. Of course she would not go down to the drawing-room. She ransacked her Saratoga trunk and found a Havet and a phrase book. She would teach Sissie the rules of French pronunciation and two or three phrases every day and make some sort of beginning of syntax with Havet. There would be no difficulty in filling up the quarter of an hour. But it would be teaching in the bad cruel old-fashioned way. To begin at once with *Piccola* or *Le Roi des Montagnes* and talk to her in the character of a Frenchman wanting to become a boarder would be the best. . . . But Sissie would not grasp that slow way. It would be too long before she began to see that she was learning anything . . . But the smattering of phrases and rules from a book handed out without any trouble to herself on her way to her room and before she wanted to go out was too little to give in exchange for a proper breakfast ready for her in a warm room every day and the option of

having single meals at any time for a very small sum . . . . . because the Baileys were trying to turn themselves into an English family prepared to receive foreigners who wanted to learn English she had promised the lessons as if she thought the plan good. . . . .

She crept downstairs through the silent empty house, pausing at the open drawing-room door to listen to the faint far-away subterranean sounds coming from the kitchen. All the furniture seemed to be waiting for someone or something. That was a console table. She must have noticed the jar on it as she came into the room, or somewhere else, it looked so familiar. One ought to know the name of the material it was made of. It was like a coarse veined agate. In the narrow strip of mirror that ran from the table high up the wall between the two french windows stood the heavy self-conscious reflection of the elegant jug. It was elegant and complete; the heavy minutely moulded flowers and leaves festooned about its tapering curves did not destroy its elegance. It stood out alone and complete against the reflected strip of shabby room. Extraordinary. Where had it come from? It was an imitation of something. A reflection of

some other life. Had it ever been seen by anybody who knew the kind of life it was meant to be surrounded by? She backed into an obstacle and turned with her hand upon the low velvet back of a little circular chair. Its narrow circular strip of back was supported by little wooden pillars. She took possession of it. The coiled spring of the seat showed its humpy outline through the velvet and gave way crookedly under her when she sat down. But she felt she was in her place in the room; out amongst its strange spaces. In front of her about the fireside were two large armchairs upholstered in shabby Utrecht velvet and a wicker chair with a woolwork cushion on its seat and a dingy antimacassar worked in crewels thrown over its high back. To her right stood a small battered three-tiered lacquer and bamboo tea-table, and beyond it a large circular table polished and inlaid and strewn with dingy books occupied the end of the room between the fireplace and the wall. On the other side of the fireplace stood a chiffonier in black wood supporting and reflecting in its little mirror a large square deeply carved dusty brown wooden box inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Crowding against the chiffonier was a large shabby bamboo tea-table and

a scatter of velvet-seated drawing-room chairs with carved dusty abruptly curving backs and legs. Away to the left rose one of the high french windows. The dingy cream lace curtains almost meeting across it, went up and up from the dusty floor and ended high up, under a red woollen valence hanging from a heavy gilt cornice. Between the curtains she could catch a glimpse of the balcony railings and strips between them of the brown brickwork of the opposite house. She stared at the vague scatter of vases and bowls and small ornaments standing in front of the large overmantel and dimly reflected in its dusty mirror. Two tall vases on the mantelshelf holding dried grasses carried her eyes up to two short vases holding dried grasses standing on the wooden-pillared brackets of the overmantel, and back again to themselves. She rose and turned away to shake off their influence and turned back again at once to see what had attracted her attention. Satsuma ; at either end of the mantelpiece shutting-in the scatter of vases and bowls two large squat rounded Satsuma basins — with arched lids. On the centre of each lid was a little gilded knob. Extraordinary. Unlike any Satsuma she had ever seen. Where had they come from ? She wandered

about the room, eagerly taking in battered chairs and more little tables and whatnots and faded pictures on the faded walls. What was it that had risen in her mind as she came into the room? She recalled the moment of coming in. The *piano* . . . . the quiet shock of it standing there with the shut-in waiting look of a piano, confronting the large stillness of the room. . . . Turning to face it she passed into the world of drawing-room pianos; the rosewood case, the faded rose silk pleating strained taut, its margin hidden under a rosewood trellis; the little tarnished sconces, for shaded candles, the small leather-topped easily twirling stool with its single thick deeply carved leg, a lady sitting, tinkling and flourishing delicately through airs with variations; an English piano, perfectly wrought and finished, music swathed and hidden in elegance . . . . "a little music" . . . but chiefly the seated form, the small cooped body, the voluminous draperies bulging over the stool and spreading in under the keyboard and down about the floor, the elegantly straying arms and mincing hands, the arch swaying of the head and shoulders, the face bent delicately in the becoming play of light . . . . . She opened the lid. It went back from the keys till

it lay flat, presenting a little music-stand folded into the sweep of its upper edge. Mustiness rose from the keys. They were loose and yellow with age. Softly struck notes shattered the silence of the room. She stood listening with loudly beating heart. The door would open and show a face with surprised eyes staring into her betrayed consciousness. The house remained silent. Her fingers strayed forward and ran up a scale. The notes were all run down but they rang fairly true to each other.

Moskowski's Serenade sounded fearfully pathetic ; as if the piano were heart-broken. It could be made to do better. Both the pedals worked, the soft one producing a woolly sweetness, the loud a metallic shallow brilliance of tone. She shut the heavy softly closing loose-handled door very carefully. Its cold china knob told her callously that her real place was in the little room upstairs with the bedroom crockery cold in the mid-morning light. But she had already shut the door. She came shyly back to the piano and sat down and played carefully and obediently piece after piece remembered from her schooldays. They left the room triumphantly silent and heavy all round her. If she got up and went away it would

be as if she had not played at all. She could not sit here playing Chopin. It would be like deliberately speaking a foreign language suddenly, to assert yourself. Playing pianissimo she slowly traced a few phrases of a nocturne. They revealed all the flat dejection of the register. With the soft pedal down she pressed out the notes in a vain attempt to key them up. Through their mournful sagging the magic shape came out. She could not stay her hands. Presently she no longer heard the false tones. The notes sounded soft and clear and true into her mind weaving and interweaving the sight of moonlit waters, the sound of summer leaves flickering in the darkness, the trailing of dusk across misty meadows, the stealing of dawn over grass, the faint vision of the Taj Mahal set in dark trees, white Indian moonlight outlining the trees and pouring over the pale facade ; over all a hovering haunting consoling voice pure and clear, in a shape, passing as the pictures faintly came and cleared and melted and changed upon a vast soft darkness, like a silver thread through everything in the world. Closing in upon her from the schoolgirl pieces still echoing in the room came sudden abrupt little scenes from all the levels of her life, deep-rooted

moments still alive within her challenging and promising as when she had left them, driven relentlessly on. . . The last chord of the nocturne brought the room sharply back. It was unchanged ; lifeless and unmoved ; nothing had passed to it from the little circle where she sat enclosed. . . . Her heart swelled and tears rose in her eyes. The room was old and experienced, full like her inmost mind of the unchanging past. Nothing in her life had any meaning for it. It waited impassively for the passing to and fro of people who would leave no impression. She had exposed herself and it meant nothing in the room. Life had passed her by and her playing had become a sentimental exhibition of unneeded life. . . She was wretched and feeble and tired. . . . Life *has* passed me by ; that is the truth. I am no longer a person. My playing would be the nauseating record of an uninteresting failure to people who have lived or a pandering to the sentimental memories of people whom life has passed by . . . . — you played that like a snail crossed in love — perhaps he was right. But something had gone wrong because I played with the intention of commenting on Alma's way of playing. . . . . That was not all. It did not



end there. There was something in music when one played alone, without thoughts. Something present, and *new*. Not affected by life or by any kind of people. . . . In Beethoven. *Beethoven* was the answer to the silence of the room. She imagined a sonata ringing out into it, and defiantly attacked a remembered fragment. It crashed into the silence. The uncaring room might rock and sway. Its rickety furniture shatter to bits. *Something* must happen under the outbreak of her best reality. She was on firm ground. The room was nowhere. She cast side-long half-fearful exultant glances. The room woke into an affronted silence. She felt astonishment at the sudden loud outbreak of assertions turning to scornful disgust. Entrenched behind the disgust something was declaring that she had no right to her understanding of the music ; no business to get away into it and hide her defects and get out of things and escape the proper exposure of her failure. In a man it would have been excusable. The room would have listened with respectful flattering indulgent tolerance till it was over and then have relapsed untouched. This dingy woman playing with the directness and decision of a man was like some

strange beast in the room. . . . It was too late to go back. She could only rush on re-affirming her assertion, shouting in a din that must be reaching up and down the house and echoing out into the street the thing that was stronger than the feeling that had prompted her appeal for sympathy. It was the everlasting parting of the ways, the wrenching away that always came. . . . The Baileys were going on downstairs with their planning, the Norwegian busy with his cold watchful grappling with England ; all of them far away, flouted. The room became a background indistinguishable from any other indifferent background. All round her was height and depth, a sense of vastness and grandeur beyond anything to be seen or heard, yet stretching back like a sheltering wing over the past to her earliest memories and forward ahead out of sight. The piano had changed. It gave out a depth and fulness of tone. By careful management she could avoid the abrupt contrast between the action of the pedals. Presently the glowing and aching of the muscles of her forearms forced her to leave off. She swung round. The forgotten room was filled with friendly light. Triumphant echoes filled its wide spaces, pressed against the

windows, filtered out into the quiet street out and away into London. When the room was still there was an unbroken stillness in the house and the street. Striking thinly across it came the tones of the solitary unaccompanied violin.

## CHAPTER III

MIRIAM let herself cautiously in. The whole house was hers ; she was a *boarder* ; but the right to linger freely in any part of it was bought by Sissie's French lessons and being Sissie's teacher meant that the Baileys could approach familiarly at any moment . . . . . all her privileges were bought with a heavy price, here and at Wimpole Street . . . . . its us ; our family ; always masquerading. But the lessons made opportunities of being affable to the Baileys ; removing the need for seeking them out purposely from time to time. Cut and dried. I've *patriotic* ballads cut and dried. I'm cut and dried, everybody thinks. Moving and speaking stiffly, the stamp of my family, the minute anything is expected of me. Nobody knows me. I grow more and more unknown and more and more like what people think of me. . . . But *I* know ; and things go on coming ; scraps of other people's things. No one in the world could

imagine what it is to me to have this house ; the fag-end of the Bailey's stock-in-trade. God couldn't know, completely. There's something wrong about it ; but damn, I can't help it. In my secret self I should love a prison. Walls. What *are* walls ?

If she scuffed her muddy shoes too cheerfully someone would appear at the dining-room door. Beyond the gaslight pouring down on to the smeary marble of the hall table and glimmering against the threatening dining-room door the dim staircase beckoned her up into darkness. A few steps and she would be going upstairs. Where ? What for ? Hgh—HEE ! at the far end of the passage beyond the hall. . . . There was a line of bright light there, coming through the chink of the little door usually hidden in the darkness beyond where the Baileys disappeared down the basement stairs. Then there was a *room* there. . . . The little door was pushed open and a man's figure stood outlined against the bright light and disappeared, shutting the door. There had been a table and a lamp upon it . . . the sound of the laugh rang in her head ; a single lively deep-chested note followed by a falsetto note that curved hysterically up. Men ; gentle-

men. How long had they been there? They would not stay. How had they come? Where had Mrs. Bailey found them? Had they already found out that it was not their sort of house? Who were they afraid of shocking with their refinement and freedom? They were making a bright little world in there by feeling themselves surrounded by people who would be shocked. They did not know there was someone there they could not shock. . . . She imagined herself in the doorway . . . . *bullo!* Fancy you *here*. . . . The dining-room door had opened and Mrs. Bailey was standing in the hall with the door open behind her. Miriam was not prepared with a refusal of the invitation to come in. She glanced over Mrs. Bailey's shoulder and saw the two girls sitting at the fireside. Two letters on the hall-table addressed to the Norwegian told her that the Baileys were alone. She yielded to Mrs. Bailey's delighted manner and went in. She would stay, keeping on her outdoor things, long enough to hear about the new people. The close sickly sweet air of the room closed oppressively round her heavy garments — Here you are young lady sit here — said Mrs. Bailey piloting her to a chair in front of the fire. There was a

stranger sitting at the fireside. Mr. Mendizabbe murmured Mrs. Bailey as Miriam sat down. Miriam's affronted eyes took in the figure of a man sitting on the wooden stool crowded in between the mantelpiece and the easy chair occupied by Sissie; a man from a café . . . . . a foreign waiter in his best clothes, sheeny stripy harsh pale grey, a crimson waistcoat showing up the gleam of a gold watch-chain, and crimson cloth slippers; an Italian, a Frenchman, a French-Swiss. He was sitting bent conversationally forward with his elbows on his knees and his hands clasped; quite at home. They had evidently been sitting there all the evening. The air was thick with their intercourse. Miriam received an abrupt nod in answer to her murmur and her stiff bow and followed with resentful curiosity the little foreign tune the man began humming far away in his head. He had not even glanced her way and the tune was his response to Mrs. Bailey's introduction. The remains of a derisive smile seemed to snort from the firmly sweeping white nostrils above his tiny trim bushily upward curving black moustache. It moulded the strong closed lips and shone behind the whole of his curiously square evenly modelled

face. The Bailey girls were watching him with shiny flushed cheeks and bright eyes. His skin was white and clean . . . . . mat; like felt . . . . . untouched and untried in the exhausted air of the shabby room. An insolent waiter. He had turned away towards the fire after his nod. From under a firm black-lashed white lid a bright dark eye gazed derision into the flames.

Go on Mr. Mendizzable smiled Mrs. Bailey brushing at her skirt with her handkerchief — we are most interested.

Hay, madame that is all, he laughed derisively in rich singing swaying tones towards the middle of the hearthrug — I skate from one end of their canal to another, faster than them all. I win their prize. Je m'en fiche —

You skated all the way along the canal. —

Ieeea skate their canal. That was Amsterdam. I do many things there. I edit their newspaper. I conduct a café.

Mts. You *have* had some adventures —

That was not adventures in Amsterdam mon dieu! He swayed drumming from foot to foot in time to his shouts. Had he really beaten those wonderful skaters? Perhaps he had not. She glanced at his brow calm, firm, dead white under



the soft crisply ridged black hair. Perhaps he was Dutch ; and that was why he looked common and also refined.

## II

At ten o'clock the youngest girl was sent to bed. Miriam scornfully watched herself miss her opportunity of getting away. She sat fascinated, resenting the interruption ; enviously filching the gay outbreking kindness that robbed the departure of humiliation and sent the girl away counting on to-morrow. He went out of his way to make *Polly Bailey* happy . . . . and sat on by the dying fire unwearied, freshly humming to himself towards the dingy hearth scattered thinly with sparse dusty ash. Mrs. Bailey returned, raked together the remains of the fire and settled herself in her chair with a shiver. In a moment she would begin her questionings and the voice would sound again. — You cold mother darling ? Come nearer the fire — Mrs. Bailey pulled her chair a few inches forward arching her neck and smiling her bright sweet smile — Oogh, its parky upstairs — Miriam implored herself to go. Parky, reiterated Mrs. Bailey uncertainly, glancing daintily from side to side and smiling away a yawn

behind her small rough reddened hand — Parky? What is parky? — *Parky*, said Mrs. Bailey, *cold*; like a park — Ah, I see. That is good. When I go upstairs I go to Hyde Park. . . . I shall have in my bedroom a band and a mass meeting, and a policeman. Salvation Army Band. Miriam sat stiffly through the laughter of the Baileys. Her refusal to join brought the discomfiting realisation of having laughed, several times during the past hour. She had laughed in spite of herself, flinging her laughter out across the hearthrug towards the dying fire, leading the laughter of the Baileys, holding them off and herself apart. Now suddenly by refusing to share their laughter when they led the way she had openly separated herself from them. Then they knew she stayed on under a charm. They had witnessed her theft from the wealth *they* had provided, her gratitude to him for the store of memories she had gathered. It was the price. It stung and tried to humiliate her. She sat steadily on, flouting it. The grouping would not recur. Why did not Mrs. Bailey make him go on talking? A cold gloom spread sideways from the polished arch of the grate, encroaching on the corner where he sat drumming and humming. She drew her

eyes with an air of absorption towards the dying fire. Its aspect was unendurably bleak. Her mind shrank from it, only to meet the sense of the cold darkness waiting upstairs. Mrs. Bailey's voice bridged the emptiness. Some inner link was restored. Somewhere in her voice was something that rang restoringly round the world. The disconnected narrative was flowing again. The chilly hearth glowed with a small dull brilliance. . . . The foreign voice went on and on, narrative dialogue commentary running flowing leaping, in the voice that rang whatever it said in bright sunshine. She listened openly, apologising in swift affectionate glances for her stiff middle-class resentment of his vulgar appearance. Was he vulgar? She tried in vain to recall her first impression. That curious blending of sturdy strength and polished refinement in the handsome head was something well-known in the head of a friend. She forced her friends to apologise and submit to the charm. . . .

## III

It was nearly midnight. The grey of to-morrow morning kept pressing on her attention. She gathered herself together to go, and rose reluc-

tantly. The outer chill came down to meet her rising form. The glow of life was left there at the heart of the circle by the fire. The little man leapt up — Hah, *good* night all — and pushed past her and out of the room. Mrs. Bailey had made some remark towards her as she neared the door. She professed not to hear and went slowly on in the wake of the footsteps leaping up the dark flights. They crossed the landing next below hers and ceased. When she rounded the stairs light blazed from a wide-open door and a little melody sounded for an instant in a smooth swaying falsetto. As soon as she had passed, the door was violently slammed . . . all those stories were *true*. And the first one about the skating. She imagined the white brow under a fur cap and the square short strong well-knit form swaying strongly from side to side, on and on, ironically winning.

## IV

Sissie read her set of phrases in heavy docility. Her will and the shapeless colourless voice murmuring from the back of her throat were given to the lesson; but the kindly sullen profile smouldered in slumber. Miriam pondered at

ease, contrasting the two voices as they placed one after the other the little trite sentences upon the empty air. That Sissie should speak her French in the worst kind of English way did not really matter. But why was it? What did it mean? They all had something in common—all the people who spoke French like that . . . . a slender young man darted noiselessly into the room and began busily dusting the sideboard. He was wearing a striped cotton jacket. Mrs. Bailey had engaged a manservant. . . . It was impossible. He would not be able to be kept. It was like a play. He was like a character in a farce, rushing on and whisking things about. It was a play; amateur theatricals, Mrs. Bailey rushing radiantly about, stage-managing. It was pretending things were different when they were not; breaking up the atmosphere of the house. Where did she get her ideas? . . . . Coming back to her surveillance she listened intently. Wait a minute, she said, we will begin all over again. I see exactly what it is. There's no difficulty. You can learn all about pronunciation in a few minutes. Sissie had started. Controlling herself she took her attention from the book long enough to give Miriam a sympathetic glancing

smile. Let the words *ring* in your head, *into* your nose and against your forehead. Sissie sat back smiling, and sat watching Miriam's face. It's *we* who speak *through* the nose. And mouth. In gusts, whoof, whoof, from the chest all sound and no enunciation. Sissie's eyes were roving intently about Miriam's face. They *stop* the breath at the lips and in the nose. Bong. That's through the nose. *Bon!* D'you hear; like a little explosion. Hold the lips tight before the b and explode the word up into the nose partly closing the back of the throat and mouth. It's all like that and the pronunciation does not vary. When you know the few rules and get the vowels pure and explode the consonants, that's all there is. Sissie waited, controlling an apologetic smile. She had realised nothing but the violent outburst and was secretly laughing over the idea of explosions. . . . Say *matin*, suggested Miriam patiently. *Matlong*, murmured Sissie. Say *mattah*, persisted Miriam. The youth came flourishing in with the coal box. That's right. Now try forcing the *ah* up into your nose and shutting your nose on it. It's time to lay the table *Emyou*, stated Sissie reprovingly towards the hearthrug. *Pliz?* — The young man reared a mild fair

crested head above the rim of the table. Lay the table, tarb, paw dinnay snapped Sissie. I shall have to go Miss Henderson she added, getting gently up and ambling to the door. The young man shot murmuring from the room. They appeared to collide in the hall. Miriam found herself in the midst of a train of thought that had distracted her during her morning's work. *Cosmopolis*, she scribbled in her note-book. The world of science and art is the true cosmopolis. Those were not the words in "Cosmopolis" but it was the idea. Perhaps no one had thought of it before the man who thought of having the magazine in three languages. It would be one of the new ideas. Tearing off the page she laid it on the sofa-head and sat contemplating an imagined map of Europe with London Paris and Berlin joined by a triangle, the globe rounding vaguely off on either side. All over the globe, dotted here and there were people who read and thought, making a network of unanimous culture. It was a tiring reflection; but it brought a comfortable assurance that somewhere beyond the hurrying confusion of everyday life something was being done quietly in a removed real world that led the other world. People arrived inde-

pendently at the same conclusions in different languages and in the world of science they communicated with each other. That made Cosmopolis. Yet it was an awful thought that the world might gradually become all one piece ; perhaps with one language ; perhaps English if those people were right who talked about Anglo-Saxon supremacy. " England and America together could rule the world." It sounded secure and comforting, like a police-station ; it would be wonderful to belong to the race whose language was spoken all over the world. All the foreigners would simply have to become English. But that brought a dreadful sense of loss. Foreign languages had a beauty that could not be found in English, and the world would be *ruled* by the kind of English people who could never get the sound of a foreign word and who therefore had all sorts of appalling obliviousness.

" You write that miss ? "

Yes, said Miriam leaping through surprise and indignation to delight. Sissie and Emile were back again in the room hurrying and angry. The little man bid them a loud good-evening ; a tablecloth was floundering out across the large table. Miriam returned to her note-book. He



was *writing*, with a scrap of pencil taken from his pocket, on her piece of paper, held against the wall. There miss he shouted gruffly, handing it to her. Lies, she read; scribbled in a rounded hand across her words, and underneath— there is NO Cosmopolis. Bernard Mendizabal.

Oh yes, there *is* a cosmopolis argued Miriam looking up and out from a whirl of convincing images. He was walking about in the window space in his extraordinary clothes, short and somehow too square for his clothes, making his clothes look square. His square roundly modelled head was changeably sculptured by the gaslight as he paced up and down. His distinction seemed to be sharpened by her words as she said *vous avez tort monsieur*. She had a sense of Emile and Sissie glancing and affronted while she slid down her sentence to leap, flouting them, forsaking her crowding thoughts, and catch at any cost, the joy of saying and hearing no matter what, in foreign speech. She would pay for the moment any price to make it sound and keep it sounding in the room. The spaces of her separate life in the house became a background for this familiar forgotten joy so unexpectedly renewed.

"*No miss !*" shouted Mr. Mendizabal. She cast a fierce general scowl towards his promenading figure. He was another of those foreigners who care for nothing in England but practising English. Then she would fight her theory.

"*Je n'ai pas tort*" he thundered, standing before her with his hands in his pockets. He was taking her French for granted. In her thankfulness she sat docile before a torrent of words taking in nothing of their meaning, throwing out provisional phrases according to his tone of question or assertion. The Baileys coming in and out of the room would see "an animated French conversation" and Sissie and Emile would forget her desperate onslaught in their admiration of the spectacle. The more she kept it glowing and emphatic and alive the further she was redeemed. She gave no glance their way. Dinner must be almost ready. Soon she would have to go. The gong would tell her. Till then she could remain immersed in the tide of words. The little man was earnest and enraged. He used his French easily and fluently. It was not wonderful to him suddenly to become French, to feel the things he expressed change, become clear neat patterns, lose

some of their meaning, fall open to attack; the pain of the failure of words so set out, was made bearable by the wonder of the journey from speech to speech. He remained himself, apparently unaware of the change of environment, or indifferent to it. . . . *En déche* what did that mean? Vous devez me voir en déche. You ought to see me en déche. That seemed to be his summing up, the basis of his denial of a cosmopolis. She attended. The only way he declared, as if recalling an earlier assertion, of proving the indifference of everyone to everyone else is to be en déche. Smiling comprehensively just before he turned on his heel and swung round, she drifted out of the room amidst the clangour of the gong . . . . en déche . . . . déchéance? . . . . somehow at a disadvantage. She thought her written phrases in French. They sounded a little grandiloquent. Someone seemed to be declaiming them from a platform. He probably had not realised what she was trying to say. But he was a cosmopolitan, and he denied that there was any cosmopolis, any sympathy between races, even between individuals. He was a pessimist. With all his charm and zest he believed in nothing and nobody. And he spoke

from experience. Perhaps it was only in thoughts not in life that these things existed. People talked about cosmopolis because they wanted to believe it. Had he said that?

## CHAPTER IV

SITTING down almost the moment Mr. Mendizabal brought him into the room and playing *Wagner*. With many wrong notes and stumbling phrases, but self-forgetfully, in the foreign way. Keeping bravely on, making the shape come even in the most difficult parts. He was hearing the Queen's Hall Orchestra all the time, and he knew that anyone who knew it could hear it too. He was one of those people who stand in the arena and talk about the music and know that there are piano scores and get them and play them. It was amazing that there should be piano scores of Wagner. Did he play because he wanted to remember the orchestra; without thinking of the people who were listening. He did not know the Baileys and their boarders. He could not imagine how extraordinary it was to hear Wagner in the room, suddenly offered to the *Baileys*. They knew something important

was going on ; sitting close round the piano surprised and attentive, busily speculating, in scraps, hampered by the need to appear to be listening. Afterwards they would talk to him arching and laughing, Mr. Mendizabal's friend. Perhaps he would come and play Wagner again ; there would be music in the room undisturbed by their forced attention. This was only a beginning.

At the end of the overture he sat quite still, making no movement of turning towards the room. The group about the piano were taken by surprise, waiting for him to turn. When they began making exclamations his hands were on the piano again. The room was silenced by strange little sentences of music. He played short fragments, unfamiliar things with strange phrasing, difficult to trace, unmelodious, but haunted by suggested melody ; a curious flattened wandering abrupt intimate message in their phrases ; perhaps Russian or Brahms. Not Wagner writing down the world in sound nor Beethoven speaking to one person. Other foreign musicians, set apart, glancing, and listening to strange single things, speaking in pain, just out of clear hearing, their speech unfinished. Russian

or Hungarian. Dvor-tchak. I will ask him. Perhaps he plays Chopin.

The Baileys were growing weary of listening. They were becoming strangers in their own dining-room, with a wonderful important evening going on all round them. Miriam consulted Sissie, probing enviously for the dark busy sulkily hidden thoughts going to and fro behind her attitude of listening. Her eyes were drawing pictures of Mr. Bowdoin's back view and noting his movements. Mrs. Bailey was still smiling her pride. Her tired eyes were strained brightly towards the performance with the proper expression of delighted appreciation. But now and again they moved observantly across the slender shabby form and revealed her circling thoughts. When she looked at the back of the thatch of soft fine fair hair she was seeing that officeful of men painting posters, the first arrival of Mr. Mendizabal, their resentment of his quick work, the poster he thought of in the night, here, and worked out at the office in an hour, the musician playing so gravely not knowing that he was being seen as the man who was forced by Mr. Mendizabal to play a Beethoven Sonata on the typewriter with his hair in curl-papers. If Mrs. Bailey went

too deeply into her speculations she would be too confused to ask him to come again. Perhaps Mr. Mendizabal would bring him anyhow. He was lounging back in his chair with his hands in his pockets. His face seemed to be laughing ironically behind a proud smile. He respected music. He admired Bowdoin for his talent. He was showing him off. It was charming . . . like Trilby. Men laughing at each other and admiring each other. . . . She had left off listening. Mr. Bowdoin was sitting there at her side, separate from his music, sitting there English, a little altered by going out into foreign music. A sort of foreigner with an English expression. Her glance had shown her an English profile, a blunted irregular aquiline, a little defaced about the mouth and chin by the influence on the muscles of a common way of speaking. But the back of his head was foreign, the outline of his skull fine and delicate, a delicate arch at the top and the back flattened a little under the soft fall of hair. He was stopping. He sat still, facing the piano. There were stirrings and murmurs and uncertain attempts at applause. Mr. Mendizabal rose and stood over him, as if to smite him on the shoulder. What do you think



about when you play *Beethoven*? — said Miriam hastily. His face came round and Mr. Mendizabal turned hilariously away to the room. — By-toven himself I think said Mr. Bowdoin quietly. — If I get a Beethoven's Sonatas would you play one? — I *will* play one for you. But not this evening I think — He turned back to the piano and Miriam gazed at his indrawn profile. He was quite English and had all the English thoughts and feelings about the little group gathered behind him in the room. But there was something besides. He was a musician and that made him understand. He knew the room was impervious to music and was ill at ease after the first joy of playing, and could not convince his hearers by vitality and exuberance as a foreigner would do even with quite fragile subdued delicately controlled music. If you care about music he said towards the piano, will you come one evening and let me play to you on my own piano? I should like it more than anything said Miriam, quivering, and clenching her clasped hands. It will be an honour and a great pleasure to me if you will come he said in his quiet weary voice. I will take the liberty of writing to suggest an evening. Miriam's abrupt rising and blind movement

left her standing opposite the lady-help, who was standing with a foot on the fender and an elbow on the mantelpiece, on the other side of the hearthrug. After only two days in the house she seemed already more at home than the Baileys ; talking derisively across at Mr. Mendizabal who was marching up and down the far side of the room with his hands in pockets shouting raillery and snorting. D'you like London Miss Scott ? said Miriam uncontrollably to her averted talking face. Miss Scott completed her sally ; the Baileys were talking to Mr. Bowdoin, just behind at the piano. Perhaps no one had witnessed her wild attack. But she could not take her eyes off Miss Scott's face. It turned towards her still wearing its derisive smile. What was that you said Miss Henderson I beg your pardon, she stated encouragingly. She was not in the least impressed by being spoken to. Her swift amused glance was all she could manage without breaking into shouts of laughter. Her laughter-shaken person was the front of a barricade of derision. Miriam repeated her question, fearfully consulting the small sheeny satin dress, with the lace collar, the neat slipper on the fender, the heavy little fringe stopping abruptly at the hollow

temples above high cheekbones and slightly hollow cheeks and leading back to a tiny knot at the top of the head. Perhaps she was a lady. Ye see so little of it unless yerra wealthy, she said in curious tonguey tones, standing upright on the hearthrug and flinging back her head with every other word ; backing away with a balancing movement from foot to foot. She laughed on her last word and stood shaking with laughter, her elbow on the far corner of the mantelshelf and her foot once more on the fender. Perhaps she was still laughing at some jest of Mr. Mendizabal's. Arrya fond of London Miss Henderson, she chuckled and went on without waiting for an answer, with rhythmically flinging head,—its ahl very well if ya can go out to theeaturras and consurruts and out and about ; but when the season comes and the people are in the parruk and in thayre grand houses having parrties and gaities and yew've just got to do nothing I think its draydefle.—She laughed consumedly, throwing back her head. Miriam got herself across the room and outside the door. On the hall table lay a letter ; from Eve ; witnessing her discomfort ; soothing, and reproaching. . . . Eve would have stayed and talked to the musician.

Up in her cold room everything vanished into the picture of Eve, deciding away down in green Wiltshire, to leave off teaching ; smiling, stretching out her firm small hands and taking hold of *London*. London changed as she read. She sat stupefied. It seemed impossible, terrifying, that Eve penniless, with her uncertain health should leave the wealthy comfort of the Greens after all these years. Too excited to read word by word she scanned the pages and learned that Madame Leroy a friend of Mrs. Green who had a flower shop in Bruton Street had engaged her. . . . . *I decorated the table for dinner each night when she was here at Christmas . . . . the Greens have been charming, quite excited about the plans . . . . coming up next week. . . .* Miriam leapt to her feet and began hastily putting on her things. "Eve is coming to London for a six months' course in floral decorations. She is putting up at a hostel." She pulled on her cold sodden shoes. "Eve is going to be an assistant in a flower shop at fifteen shillings a week. She has taken a cubicle at a branch of the Young Women's Bible Association." By the time she was ready she felt she must have dreamed the news. Eve, not a governess, free, in London, just as she was herself. Another

self, in London. Eve being led about and taught London, going about under the same skies, in the streets, feeling exactly as she felt. Nothing would have changed before she came. The rain gently thudding on the roof and rattling against the landing skylight was Eve's rain. She was listening to it and hearing it in exactly the same way. . . .

The girls did not realise the news at all. They kept going off into questions about details until the fact of Eve's coming disappeared altogether and only Eve's point of view and Eve's courage and her difficulties remained. . . . One had told the wrong way. Better not to have given any facts at all but just to have said Eve's coming to London; isn't it weird? But then they would have said is she coming to London to see the Queen? The Queen. That would have been true. She was coming to London partly to see the Queen. Perhaps the trouble was that they had been cheated by not being told exactly how Eve was only just managing to come at all and how scraped everything would be. But at least they realised that one had people belonging to one who made up their minds and did definite things, like other people. It was amazing to decide to come to London and be a florist;

*Napoleon.* They realised that and nothing else. She would be able to tell Mr. Hancock on Monday ; first him, first thing in the morning and the Orlys during the day.

Mr. Hancock understood at once, making no response at all at first and then standing quietly about near her as she busied herself with her dusting really giving himself to taking in the simple stupendous fact ; and really realising it before asking any questions and asking them in a tone that showed he knew what it meant and going on showing all day in his manner that he knew what it was that kept her so brisk about her work. He was divine ; he was a divine person. She would never forget being able to say just anyhow, h'm, I've got a *sister* coming to London ; and his immediate silent approach across the room, drying his hands. . . . . Of *course* the Orlys immediately said Oh how nice for you, you won't be so lonely. *What* did people mean about loneliness ? It was always the people arranged in groups and seeming so lost and isolated and lonely who said that. . . . . To-night she would begin turning out her room for Eve's reception. No. It was the Dante lecture. . . . The day Eve came she would buy some flowers. She

understood now why people wanted to put flowers in their rooms when people were coming. She would be a hostess. Some people bought flowers and carried them home when they were alone. . . . It must be like inviting a guest to keep you company. Like saying you were alone and not liking being alone and putting flowers about to tell you all the time that you did not want to be alone but were. People *talked* about these things. "I always buy flowers when I am alone." Like suddenly taking off all their things and showing that they had a crooked body. If they were really miserable about being alone they would be too miserable to buy flowers. If they really wanted the flowers enough to buy them they were already not alone. If they bought the flowers in that fussy excited thoughtless way people seemed to do things they were neither really ever alone or ever really with people . . . . they were in that sort of state that made social life a talkative nothingness sliding about on nothing. . . .

At the end of the afternoon she wandered forgetfully into the warmth of the empty waiting-room. The house was silent. Her footsteps made no sound along the carpeted hall and were

lost in the thick turkey carpeting of the waiting-room floor. The room was lit only by the fire-light. From its wide clear core striped by black bars a broad rose-gold shaft glowed out across the room reaching the copper vessels on the black oak sideboard and the lower part of the long mirror between the windows where the midmost piece of copper gleamed in reflection. She stood still, holding the warm air in her nostrils, everything was blotted out and then restored to its place . . . . what place, why was it good, what was she trying to remember? . . . . In the familiar fire-lit winter darkness was a faint dry warm scent . . . . . mimosa. It was a repetition . . . . . It had been there last year, suddenly ; drily fragrant in the winter darkness of the warm room preparing for the light and warmth of the evening. It had seemed then like some wealthy extravagance, bringing a sense of the freedom of wealth to have things out of season, and a keen sudden memory in the dark London room of the unspoken inexpressible beauty of Newlands . . . . . its soft-toned softly carpeted and curtained effect, fragrant with clusters of winter flowers, standing complete somewhere in the secret black spaces of her mind. . . . . But now here it was again,



just at the same moment, just before the winter darkness began to give way. Perhaps mimosa came at this time of year suddenly in the shops, before the spring flowers, and careful people like Mrs. Orly could buy it . . . then in London mimosa was the sign of *spring*. It was like the powdery fragrance of a clear warm midsummer evening, like petal-dust ; pollen-dust ; the whole summer circling in the glow of firelight. Then Eve would not come this winter. The darkest secret winter-time of London was over again. It would come again in single moments and groups of days, but its time was gone. The moment of realisation of spring had come by surprise ; there lay all the spring days ahead leading on to summer spread out for anyone to see, calling to Eve or to anyone who might have come into the room to whom one could have said doesn't the smell of mimosa make you realise the winter is over ; and here within, lit up as if by a suddenly switched on electric light was one's own real realisation going back and back ; in pictures that grew clearer, each time something happened that switched on a light within the black spaces of your mind. Things that no one could share, coming again and again just as some outside thing

was beginning to interest you, as if to *remind* you that the inmost reality comes to you when you are alone. . . . The prospect of Eve's coming was changed. The pang of the mimosa came nearer than anything she could bring. Perhaps it would be possible to tell her about this moment? Perhaps her coming had made it more real. Yet now it did not seem to matter so much whether she came or not. In a way it seemed as though the fact of her coming threatened something.

## 2

“Antoine Bowdoin.” If she had had a solemn letter from him first she would never have undertaken to go and hear him play. The formal courtly old-fashioned phrases had nothing to do with the hours of music. She had thought of nothing but the music on the good piano and now when she had forgotten all about it there was this awful result; the “few friends” gathered together in his room on a fixed date so that she might go and hear him play. She would have to sit, with a party, and afterwards find something to say. . . . An Englishman, solemn and polite, playing foreign music, with English

friends politely and solemnly sitting round. There was no word of Mr. Mendizabal. He was not going. If he had been Mr. Bowdoin would not have said I will call at six-thirty for the purpose of escorting you to my rooms. He was like a gaoler. Perhaps the walk would be an opportunity of getting over nervousness. There would be music at once, no meal to get through. She would thank him very much for the great treat and when it was over there would only be Eve and the accomplishment of having heard a good piano played by a musician. He could be dropped. . . . He could be asked to come just once and play for Eve. That would be a great London evening for Eve. . . . . The sense of a complex London life crowded with engagements made her pace in spite of her weariness up and down the platform at Gower Street. Its familiar sulphurous gloom, the platform lights shining murkily from the midst of slowly rolling clouds of grey smoke, the dark forms and phantom white faces of waiting passengers emerging suddenly as she threaded the darkness, revived her. By the time the train rolled slowly in behind its beloved black dumpy high-shouldered engine with its large unshrieking mushroom bell-whistle

the journey had changed from being an expedition to a spot within five minutes' walk of Sarah's, unconfessed to Sarah, and had become a journey on the Metropolitan ; going indeed outside the radius into blackness, but going so far only because the Dante lecture, wandered out of London was waiting there ; and to be repeated at the end of the evening safely returning through increasing gloom until the climax of Gower Street was reached again. . . . . Miss Scott was *Scotch*.

She reached the little hall in the suburban road in good time and sat in a forward row staring at the little platform where presently the educative voice would be standing. She was conscious of a stirring and buzzing all about her that had been absent in the London hall. The first series of lectures had not brought any sense of an audience. Here the many audible centres of culture, the eager discussions and sudden incisive remarks, the triumphant intensity on the faces of some of the women caught as she glanced now and then fearfully about, the curious happy briskness of the men, made her feel that the lecturer was superfluous ; All these people were the cultured refined kind who did not trouble much about

their clothes. There were no furs to be seen ; the women wore large rather ugly coats or ulsters or capes and bashed muddly looking hats and had mufflers or long scarves. In the London audience herself and her clothes had been invisible, here they were just right, a sort of hall-mark. In her black dress with her clumsy golf-cape thrown back from her shoulders, her weather-worn felt hat softened perhaps to harmony with her head in the soft light she could perhaps pass for a cultured person. *Bianchi* and *Neri* whispered her neighbour eagerly in the midst of a long sentence addressed to a girl at her side. She was an Englishwoman. But her mind was so at home in the Middle Ages that she spoke the names and used the Italian pronunciation without a touch of pedantry, and as eagerly and interestedly as anyone else might say " they're engaged ! " The clergyman in the row in front would drawl out the words with an unctuous suggestion of superior knowledge. He would use them to crush someone. Most of the men present were a little like that, using their knowledge like a code or a weapon. But the women were really interested in it, they were like people who had climbed a hill and were eagerly intent on what they could see on the

other side. It was refreshing and also in some way comforting to be with them. They represented something in life that was going to increase. Perhaps it would increase too much ; they seemed so headlong and unaware of anything else. Did she want a world made up of women like this ? If she spoke to them they would assume she was one of themselves and look busily at her with unseeing eyes, fixed only on all the things they thought about, until they perceived that she was a fraud. Long intercourse with them might make her able to talk like they did, but never to think in the way they did. Never to have the extraordinary busy assured appearance presented by their persons when you could not see their eager faces ; a look that made them seem to be going very fast in some direction that completely satisfied them, so that if a fire broke out behind them suddenly they would regard it not as an adventure that might have been expected but as an annoying interruption, like tripping over a stone. . . .

She could see that when he read the sonnets he forgot how learned he was. The little lecture had had its own fascination. But it was a lecture ; something told by a specialist to an audience.

This was Dante's voice, and they all listened as they could ; the lecturer as well. All his knowledge was put aside and he listened as he read. She sat listening, her shocked mind still condemning her for not having discovered for herself that it was wrong to have a post-office savings account and that betting and gambling and lotteries were wrong because they produced nothing. For a time she flashed about with the searchlight of the new definition of vice . . . . money can't produce money . . . then all trade was wrong in some way . . . dissipation of value without production . . . . there was some principle that all civilisation was breaking . . . . how did this man know that it was wrong to imagine affection if there was no affection in your life, that dreaming and brooding was a sort of beastliness . . . love was actual and practical, moving all the spheres and informing the mind. That was true. That was the truth about everything. But who could attain to it? Dante knew it because he loved Beatrice. How could humanity become more loving? How could social life come to be founded on love? How can I become more loving? I do not know or love anyone but myself . . . it did not mean being loved. It was

not anything to do with marriage. Dante only *saw* Beatrice. But this is the awful truth ; however one may sit as if one were not condemned and forget again. This is the difficult thing that *everyone* has to do. Not dogmas. This man believes that there is a God who loves and demands that man shall be loving. That is what will be asked. That is the judgment. It is true because it breaks into you and condemns you. Everything else is distraction and sham. The humble yearning devotion in the voice reading the lines made it a prayer, the very voice a prayer to a spirit waiting all round, present in himself, in every tone listening, in the very atmosphere. It was there, to be had. It was like something left far behind one on a dark road and still there ; to be had for the asking, to be had by merely turning towards it. . . . . She looked into the eyes of Dante across the centuries as into the eyes of a friend. But then these people were the same. It was the truth about everybody "the goodwill in all of us". . . . .

She travelled back towards London in a dream. Her compartment was empty. All the people in the world, full of goodwill without troubling or even thinking about it were away somewhere



else. Just as she had learned what people were there was nobody. There was no love in her nature. If there were any she would not have been sitting here alone. If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen how shall he love God whom he hath not seen? There was a catch in that like a riddle. Heads I win tails you lose. . . . If you keep quite quiet and gentle, asking for nothing, not being anything, not holding on to anything in your life, nor thinking about anything in your life there is something there . . . . behind you . . . that must be God, the way to Christ; the edge of the way to Christ. Keeping quiet and coming to that you feel what you are and that you have never begun being anything but your evil natural self. You feel thick with evil . . . . oh . . . . that was prayer. One could become more loving. It is answered at once. Just turning towards that something, in a desire to be different, begins to change you! At Praed Street the carriage began to fill with seated forms. This was the beginning of new life. . . . Keeping perfectly still and looking at no one she realised the presence of her fellow-travellers, all just like herself, living from within by the contact with the edge of Christ . . . . all *knowing* the

thing that to her was only a little flicker just dawning in a long life of evil. It made them kindly in the world and able to understand each other. Perhaps it was the explanation of all the fussing. Everyone in the world was bathed in the light of love except herself. . . . It was not certain that a whole lifetime of prayer and gentleness and self-control would destroy enough of the thick roots of evil in her to bring her through into the Paradiso. . . . But if prayer, just the turning away from all one knew begging to be destroyed and made loving brought such an immediate sense of the evil in oneself and the good in everyone else, there was no end to what it might do. Prayer was the work to do in life, nothing else. But the turning to the unseen God of love and giving up one's self-will meant being changed in a way one could not control or foresee ; dropping everything one had and cherished secretly and having things only in common with other people. It would mean going forward with nothing into an unknown world ; *always* being agreeable, and agreeing. I *love* all these people she murmured in her mind and felt a glow that seemed to radiate out to all the corners of the compartment. It's *true*. This is life. This is

the only way in. It may be that I am so bad that I can only sit with all my evil visible silent amongst humanity for the rest of my life, learning to love them, and then die out completely because I am too bad to be quite new-born . . . .

her eyes were drawn towards the face of the woman sitting opposite to her ; a shapeless body, a thin ravaged face strained and sheeny with fatigue and wearing an expression of undaunted sweetness and patience. Children and housework and a selfish husband and nothing in life of her own. She was at the disposal of everyone for kind actions. She would be *really* sympathetic and shocked about an earthquake in China. Was that it ? Was that being *inside* ? Was that all there was ? The woman did not see the wonderful gold brown light in the carriage ; nor the beauty of the blackness outside. In her brain was the pain and pressure of everything she had to do. She was good and sweet ; perfectly good and sweet. But there was something irritating about her . . . .

her obliviousness of everything but " troubles," other people's as much as her own. Yet she would love a day in the country. The fields and the flowers would make her cry. It was her obliviousness that made one afraid of associating

with her. Being in conversation with her or in any way associated with her life there would always be the dreadful imprisoned feeling of knowing she did not *think*. . . . Her glance slid over the other seated forms and fell, leaving her struggling between her desire to feel in loving union with them and her inability to ignore the revelations pouring from their bearing and shapes, their clothes and the way they held their belongings. They were terrible and hateful because all their thoughts were visible. The terrible maddening thing about them was the thoughts they did not think. It made them worse than the woman because to get on with them one would have to pretend to see life as they saw it. It would be so easy and deceitful with each one alone, knowing exactly what line to take. She wrenched herself back to her prayer . . . . instantly the thought came that all these people far away in themselves wanted to be more loving. She drew herself together and sat up staring out towards the darkness. That was an answer again! A state of mind that came from the state of prayer. But then one would need always to be in a state of prayer. It would be very difficult. It would be almost impossible even to remember it in the

rush of life . . . . it would mean being a sort of fool . . . . having no judgments or opinions. It would *spoil* everything. There would be no time for anything. Nothing beyond one's daily work and all the rest of the time being all things to all men. It meant that now at this moment one must give up the sense of the train going along in the darkness and the sense of the dark streets waiting lamplit under the dark sky and go out to the people in the carriage and then on to the people at Tansley Street . . . . she thought of people she knew who did this, appearing to see nothing in life but people, and recoiled. *Places* to them were nothing but people; there was something they missed out that could not be given up. Something goes if you lose yourself in humanity. You cannot find humanity by looking for God only there. Making up your mind that God is to be found in humanity is humanism. . . . It was Comte's idea. Perhaps Unitarians are all Comtists. That is why they dress without style. They are more interested in social reform than the astoundingness of there being people *anywhere*. But to see God everywhere is pantheism. What *is* Christianity? Where are Christians? Evangelicals are humanitarians; rushing about

in ulsters. Anglicans know all about the beauty of life and like comfort. But they are snobs and afraid of new ideas . . . . convents and monasteries stop your mind. But there is a God or a Christ, there is something always there to answer when you turn away to it from everything. Perhaps one would have to remain silent, for years, for a lifetime, and in the end begin to understand.

## 3

At Gower Street it was eleven o'clock. She was faint with hunger. She had had no dinner and there was nothing in her room. She wandered along the Euston Road hoping to meet a potato-man. The shopfronts were black. There was nothing to meet her need but the empty stretch of lamplit pavement leading on and on. . . . Rapid walking in the rain-freshened air relieved her faintness but she dreaded waking in the night with gnawing hunger to keep her awake and drag her up exhausted in the morning. A faint square of brighter light on the pavement ahead came like an accusation. Passing swiftly across it she glanced bitterly at the frosted door through which it came. Restaurant. Donizetti Brothers.

The whole world had conspired to leave her alone with that mystery shut in and hidden every day the whole of her London time behind its closed frosted doors and forcing her now to admit that there was food there and she must go in or have the knowledge of being starved through fear. Her thoughts flashed painfully across a frosted door long ago in Baker Street and she saw the angry handsome face of the waiter who had shouted roll and butter and whisked away from the table the twisted cone of serviette and the knives and forks. That was in the middle of the day. It would be worse at night. Perhaps they would even refuse to serve her. Perhaps it was impossible to go into a restaurant late at night alone. She was coming back. There was nothing to be seen behind the steamy panes on either side of the door but plants standing on oil cloth mats. Behind them was again frosted glass. It was not so grand as Baker Street. There was no menu in a large brass frame with Schweppe's at the top. She pushed open the glass door and was confronted by another glass door blankly frosted all over. Why were they so secret? Inside the second door she found herself at the beginning of a long aisle of linoleum. On either

side people were dotted here and there on short velvet sofa seats behind marble topped tables. In the close air there was a strong smell made up of all kinds of meat dishes. A waiter flicking the crumbs from a table glanced sharply round at her and went off down the room. He had seen the shifts and miseries that haunted all her doings. They were apparent in the very hang of her cloak. She could not first swing down the restaurant making it wave for joy as it did when she walked across Trafalgar Square in the dark and then order a roll and butter. After this it would never wave for joy again. A short compact bald man in a white apron was hurrying down the aisle, towards *her*. He stopped just in front of her and stood bowing and indicating a near empty table with his short arm and stood silently hovering while she dragged herself into place on the velvet sofa. The waiter rushing up with a menu was gently waved away and the little man stood over the side of the table blocking out the fuller end of the restaurant. Hardly able to speak for the beating of her heart she looked up into a little firm round pallid face with a small snub nose and curious pale waxy blue eyes and said furiously oh please just a roll and butter and a cup of cocoa.



The little man bowed low with a beaming face and went gently away. Miriam watched him go down the aisle bowing here and there right and left. The hovering waiter came forward questioningly to meet him and was again waved aside and she presently saw the little man at a speaking tube and heard him sing in a soft smooth high monotone, un-sho-co-lat. He brought her things and arranged them carefully about her and brought her an Illustrated London News from another table. She sipped and munched and looked at all the pictures. The people in the pictures were real people. She imagined them moving and talking in all manner of circumstances and suffered their characteristics gently, feeling as if some one were there gently half-reproachfully holding her hands tied behind her back. The waiter roamed up and down the aisle. People came in, sometimes two or three at a time. The little man was sitting writing with a stern bent face at a little table at the far end of the restaurant just in front of a marble counter holding huge urns and glass dishes piled with buns and slices of cake. He did not move again until she rose to go when he came once more hurrying down the aisle. Her bill was sixpence and he

took the coin with a bow and waited while she extricated herself from the clinging velvet, and held the door wide for her to pass out. Good evening thank you very much she murmured hoping that he heard, in response to his polite farewell. She wandered slowly home through the drizzling rain warmed and fed and with a glow at her heart. Inside those frightful frosted doors was a home, a bit of her own London home.

## 4

The hall gas was out. The dining-room door was ajar showing a faint light and light was coming from the little room at the end of the passage. Miriam cautiously pushed open the dining-room door. Mrs. Bailey was sitting alone poised socially in a low armchair by the fire with the gas turned low. Miriam came dutifully forward in response to the entrancement of her smile and stood on the hearthrug enwrapped in her evening, invaded by the sense of beginning it anew with Mrs. Bailey. When had she seen Mrs. Bailey last? She could tell her now about Eve in great confidential detail and explain that she could not *at present* afford to come to Tansley

Street. That would be a great sociable conversation and the engagement with Mr. Bowdoin would remain untouched. She stood in a glow of eloquence. Mrs Bailey preened and bridled and made little cheerful affectionate remarks and waited silent a moment before asking if it rained. Miriam forgot Eve and gathered herself together for some tremendous communication. Was it raining? She glanced at the outside London world and was lost in interchanging scenes, her mind split up, pressing several ways at once. Mrs. Bailey saw all these scenes and felt and understood them exactly as she did. There was no need to answer the question. She glanced stonily towards her and saw the downcast held-in embarrassment of her waiting form. In a dry professional official voice she said gazing at the hearthrug with an air of judicial profundity, *no*, at least oh yes, I *think* it is raining and drifted helplessly towards the window. The challenge was behind her. She would have to face it again. A borrowed voice said briskly within her yes its pouring, I *hope* it will be fine to-morrow, what *weather* we have had; well *goodnight* Mrs. Bailey. I have been to a lecture she said in imagination standing by the window. It was what any

other boarder would have said and then so fine, such a splendid lecturer and told the subject and his name and one idea out of the lecture and they would have agreed and gone cheerfully to bed, with no thoughts. To try and really tell anything about the lecture would be to plunge down into misrepresentations and misunderstandings and end with the lecture vanished. To say anything real about it would lead to living the rest of her life with the Baileys helping them with their plans . . . she turned and came busily back. It's very late she murmured. Mrs. Bailey smiled and yawned. At least not so very late, not quite to-morrow she pursued turning round to the clock and back again to consult the pictures and the wall paper. Just staying there was answering Mrs. Bailey's question. Suddenly she laughed out and turned, laughing, as if she were about to communicate some mirthful memory. It's too *absurd* she said distracted between the joy of her lingering laughter and the need for instantly inventing an explanation. Mrs. Bailey was laughing delightedly. There was a most absurd thing—chanted Miriam above her laughter ; a gentle tap took Mrs. Bailey scurrying to the door May I have a *candle* Mrs. Bailey

murmured a low voice in a curious solidly curving intonation. Certainly doctor answered Mrs. Bailey's voice in the hall. She scurried away downstairs. Miriam turned towards the window and stood listening to St. Pancras clock striking midnight. Then those men in the little back sitting-room were *doctors*. How pleased and proud Mrs. Bailey must be. How wonderful of her to say nothing about them. Can I have a *candle* missuz Bailey. Wrapped away in the suave strong courteous voice were the knowledge and the fineness of a world no one in the house knew anything about. Mrs. Bailey dimly knew, and screened it fearing to lose it. She had the wonderful voice all to herself. "Good evening." The voice was in the *room*. Miriam turned instantly; a square strong-looking man a little over middle height with flat pale fair hair smooth on a squarish head above grave bluntly moulded features was moving easily forward from the door. They met at the end of the table standing one each side the angle of the fireside corner, smiling as if her murmured response to his greeting had been a speech in a play ready-made to bring them together. Miriam felt that if she had said oh I'm so glad he would have responded yes; so am I.

My name's von Heber he announced quietly, his restrained uncontrollably deepening smile sending out a radiance all round her. It was as if they had met before without the opportunity of speaking and here at last was the opportunity and they had first to smile out their recognition of its perfection. They stood in a radiant silence, his even tones making no break in their interchange. She felt a quality in him she had not met before; in the ease of his manner there was no trace of the complacent assumption of the man of the world. His deference was no mask worn to decorate himself. It was deliberate and yet genuine. It was the shape in which he presented to her, personally, set above and away from her ugly clothes and her weariness, the beam of delight which had been his inward greeting. The completeness and confidence of his delight, his own completeness and security revealed to her an unknown reading of life that she longed to hold and fathom. She offered in return as a measure of her qualification, the laughter she had laughed to Mrs. Bailey, hoping he had heard it. I find this custom of putting down the light at eleven very inconvenient he was saying. Miriam smiled and listened eagerly for more of the low even

curiously curving intonations. I propose to take the London medical examination in July and I've a good deal of hard work to get through prior to that date. He had not been going to stop speaking but Miriam found an immense welcoming space for the word she summoned in vain desperately from far away Wimpole Street. The *conjoint* she declared at last eagerly, almost before the word reached her consciousness. The Conjoint he repeated and as his voice went on Miriam contemplated the accumulation they had gathered. She stood smiling, growing familiar with the quality of his voice, gathering the sense of a word here and there. Through his talk he smiled a quiz-zical pleased appreciation of this way of listening. She felt as if they were talking backwards, towards something already said and when she took in I'm taking the post-graduate *course* at your great hospital near here she tried in vain to resist the temptation of leading his talk down into detail. The way to preserve the charm unbroken would be to let him go on talking. She might even listen carefully, and learn the meaning of the post-graduate course and its place in the London medical world; the whole of the London medical world was being transformed by this man into

something simple and joyful. But the eager words had escaped her — oh ; that's the one with the glorious yarn. Tell me the yarn he chuckled gently, showing a row of strong squarish flawless teeth. Well, she said the big surgeons were operating and the patient was collapsing and one said I think it is time we called in Divine aid. Nonsense said the other I don't believe in unqualified assistants. That's great he declared ; that's one of the greatest yarns I've heard. I shan't forget it. He was not shocked and she had told the story as evenly and as much without emphasis as he would have done himself. She suddenly realised that this was the way to say things. It made no pause and did not disturb anything. She was learning from him every moment. He was *utterly* different to the men she knew. He did not resent her possession of the story nor attempt to cap it. You've got some very great men over here he said ; some of the very greatest ; and he began outlining the Canadian reputation of names that were amongst the pinnacles of Wimpole Street conversation. She learned exactly why Victor Horsley was great in the world and what it was that Dr. Barker did to fractured knee-caps. When



Mrs. Bailey came up it was half-past twelve. He accepted his candle and thanked her gravely and gravely took his leave. Miriam and Mrs. Bailey were left confronted. Miriam laughed a social laugh, unintentionally, and listened happily to Mrs. Bailey's kind brisk echo of it as she stood turning out the gas. They turned to each other in the hall and laughed goodnight. Mrs. Bailey was like a happy excited girl. She trotted busily and socially downstairs humming a tune towards a sociable waiting world, flouting difficulties with the sweep of the laughter in her voice.

Your Barker and your Horsley mused Miriam slackening her speed on the stairs ; the sound of the low quiet glad confident voice steadying the aspect of the world and a strange new sense of the London medical world dotted by men who were world-famous, approached from afar, reverently, for specialist training, by already qualified medical men, competed together within her as she prepared for bed, going serenely through all the tiresome little processes. Something in the centre of life had steadied and clarified. It sent a radiance like sunlight through the endless processes of things ; even a ragged tooth-brush was a part of the sunlit scene ; not unnoticed, or just dismal, but a part of the sunlit scene.

## CHAPTER V

**S**TILL talking, Mr. Bowdoin went up the rubbish-strewn steps and opened the dusty blistered door with his latchkey. Miriam followed him into a dark bare passage and down carpetless stairs into a large chilly twilit basement room. Nothing was visible but a long kitchen table lit by a low barred window at the far end of the room. I will light a lamp for you in a moment he murmured in his formal cockney monotone ; my friends will be arriving soon and before they come I should like to show you my sketches. Miriam sat down silently. The feeling of the neighbourhood was in the room. A heavy blankness lay over everything. She felt nowhere. It had been difficult to take part in conversation walking along the Farringdon Road. It was strange enough to know that anyone lived in a road almost in the city ; and paying a visit there was like stepping out of the world.

With his slow even speech Mr. Bowdoin

rebuked her here even more strongly for her outbreak of excited talk and loud laughter about Devonshire. He had not felt that they were walking along, outside London, in blank space, free, and exactly alike in their thoughts. He had not had that moment when they turned into the strange dead road *east* of Bloomsbury, nowhere, and he had seemed like herself at her side and he ought to have laughed and laughed. His sudden searching look, are you mad or intoxicated, with your sudden Billingsgate manners, had said that Farringdon Road was in the world and that he intended to conduct himself in the usual manner of a gentleman escorting a lady. As he lit a little lamp on the corner of the table she glanced at the back of his hair and imagined him sitting at a typewriter with it in curl-papers, and determined to be at ease. What a jolly room she exclaimed with strained animation as the lamplight wavered up and then sat looking at her hands. It would be cruel to look about the room. She had seen kitchen chairs standing sparsely about in the spaces unoccupied by the table, a cottage piano standing at right angles with the low window and one picture over the piano. There was nothing else in the room. The

floor was covered with strips of coarse worn oil-cloth and there was nothing above the empty mantel-piece. It is quite bohemian said Mr. Bowdoin lighting the piano candles. Let me take your cloak. Miriam slipped off her golf-cape and he disappeared between curtains at the end of the room opposite the window.

This was Bohemia ! She glanced about. It was the explanation of the room. But it was impossible to imagine Trilby's milk-call sounding at the door. . . . . It was Bohemia ; the table and chairs were *bohemian*. Perhaps a big room like this would be even cheaper than a garret in St. Pancras. The neighbourhood did not matter. A bohemian room could hold its own anywhere. No furniture but chairs and a table, saying when you brought people in I am a Bohemian and having no one but Bohemians for friends. There must be a special way of behaving in English Bohemia. Perhaps when the friends came she would find it out. I have the sketches in a drawer here said Mr. Bowdoin coming back through the curtains and turning up an end of the tablecloth. . . . . Ah ! C'est le pied de Trilby. Wee. D'après nature ? Nong. De mémoire, alors ? . . . . . où rien ne troublera, Trilby,

qui dorrr-mira, thought Miriam. She took the little water-colour sketches one by one and listened carefully to Mr. Bowdoin's descriptions of the subjects, trying to think of something to say. It was wonderful that he should take so much trouble on a holiday. The words in his descriptions brought Devonshire scenes alive into her mind, and she could imagine how he felt as he looked at them . . . . . *plats d'épinards* . . . . . it was like the difference between the French and English Bohemia. But the true thing in it was that he had wanted to do them. That gave him his right to call himself a Bohemian. He would have tried to write if he wanted to and have gone to live in a garret in Fleet Street. Why don't you put them about the room she asked insincerely. It was false and cruel; a criticism of the room which was beginning to show its real character; not interfering; plain and clear for things to happen and shine out in in their full strength. And it was a flattery of the pictures which were nothing. Well, they're just beginnings. Hardly worthy of exhibition. I hope to attain to something better in the future. Where did he find all his calm words and self-confidence. Perhaps it was the result of having a

room to invite friends to and talk about things in. But how could anybody do anything with people coming and going, confusing everything by perpetually *saying* things? She stared obediently at sketch after sketch until her eyes ached. It was going on too long. Her strength was ebbing out and the evening was still to come. He liked showing his sketches and thought she was entertained. Even in Bohemia people thought it was necessary to always be doing some definite thing. There was a knocking at the front door upstairs. Mr. Bowdoin went quickly up and came down with a tall lady. He introduced her and she bowed and at once took off her outdoor things. While he was putting them away behind the curtains she sat briskly down on a chair at the far end of the room in a line with Miriam and arranged her hair and her dress with easy unconcerned movements. She did not look in the least bohemian. She sat drawn up in her chair very tall and thin in a clumsy dress with a high stiff collarband. Her head and hair above her thin dingy neck were — common. Undoubtedly. She looked like a post-office young lady. She was quite old, twenty-seven or twenty-eight. While the other people came in she sat very still and

self-possessed, as if nothing were happening. Was that dignity? Not attempting to hide your peculiarities and defects, but just keeping perfectly still and calm whatever happened? There were two men and another woman. They stood about in the gloom near the door while Mr. Bowdoin carried away their things and came back and murmured Miss Rogers and Miss Henderson, and then sat down in a row on the kitchen chairs in line near the piano. Their faces were above the reach of the lamplight. Their bodies had the subdued manner of the less important sitters in a parish church. Mr. Bowdoin was putting the little lamp on the top of the piano. The light ran up the wall. The picture was a large portrait of Paderewski. It was amongst Miriam's records of Queen's Hall posters, coming and going amongst other posters of musicians, passed by with a hurried glance, soon obliterated by the oncoming of the blazing flower-baskets as she hurried down Langham Place sore with her effort to forget the reminders of music beyond her reach. Looking at it now she felt as if all she had missed were suddenly brought to her; her sense of thwarting and loss was swept away. She sat up relieved, bathed in

sunshine. The room was full of life and warmth and golden light. She eagerly searched the features until Mr. Bowdoin took the lamp off the piano and sat down murmuring I will give you a sonata of Bytoven. The outline of the face shone down through the gloom. She could recall each feature in perfect distinctness. All the soft weakness of the musical temperament was there, the thing that made people call musicians a soft weak lot. But there was something else ; perhaps it was in all musicians who were such great executors as to be almost composers. The curious conscious half-pleading sensitive weakness of the mouth and chin were dreadful ; a sort of nakedness as if a whole weak nature were escaping there for everyone to see ; and then suddenly reined in ; held in and back by the pose of the reined-in head. The great aureole of fluffy hair was shaped and held in shape by the same power. The whole head, soft and weak in all its details, was resolute and strong. . . . . If the face were raised to look outwards it would be weak, pained and suffering and almost querulously sorrowful ; but in its own right pose it was happy and strong. The pose of the head gave it its grip on the features and the hair and made *beauty*. The pose of



*listening.* The eyes saw nothing. The reined-in face was listening, intently, from a burning bush. . . . . There was some reason not yet understood why musicians and artists wore long hair.

The long sonata came to an end while Miriam was still revolving amongst her thoughts. When Mr. Bowdoin sat back from the piano she returned to the point where she had begun and determined to stop her halting circular progress from group to group of interesting reflections and to listen to the next thing he might play. She was aware he was playing on his own piano better than he had done at Tansley Street but also more carefully and less self-forgetfully. Perhaps that was why she had not listened. She could not remember ever before having thoughts, about definite things while music was going on, and felt afraid lest she was ceasing to care for music. She found it would be quite easy to speak coolly, with an assumption of great appreciation and ask him to play some definite thing. Just as she was about to break into the silence with a remark, one of the big curtains was suddenly drawn aside by a little old lady bearing a tray of steaming cups. She stood just inside the curtains, her delicate white haired lace-capped head bowing from side to

side of the room graciously, a gentle keen smile on her delicately shrivelled face. My mother, murmured Mr. Bowdoin as he went down the room for the tray. Slender and short as he was, she was invisible behind him as he bent for the tray and when he turned with it to the room she had disappeared. Miriam gazed at the dark curtains hoping for her return and dreading it. Nothing suitable to an enthusiastic bohemian evening could be said in a courtly manner. . . . She accepted a cup of coffee without a word as if Mr. Bowdoin had been a waiter, and sat flaring over it. She felt as if nothing could be said until there had been some reference to the vision. She hoped everyone had bowed and remembered with shame that she had only stared. Everyone seemed to be stirring; but the beginnings of speech went forward as if the little old lady had never appeared. Mr. Bowdoin had sat down with the men on the other side of the room and the woman had crossed over to a chair near Miss Rogers and was in eager conversation with her. Miss Rogers has only lately joined musical circles she heard Mr. Bowdoin say in an affectionate indulgent tone. That accounted for the way she deferred to him and sat in a sort of complacent

exclusive rapture, keeping her manner unchanged before the onslaught of the eagerly talking woman. The woman was in the circle and did not seem to think it strange that Miss Rogers should be a candidate. She was talking about some orchestra somewhere . . . . . of something she wanted to play, *be* conducting, she finished in a tone of worship. Her voice was refined and she talked easily, but she also had the common uneducated look . . . . and she was talking about Camberwell. Mr. Bowdoin was a conductor of an orchestra. Those people played in orchestras, or wanted to. The three men were talking in eager happy sentences and laughing happily and not noisily. There was something here that was lacking in Miss Szigmondy's prosperous musical people, something that kept them apart from the world where they made their living. . . . They worked hard in two worlds . . . . when Mr. Bowdoin was at the piano again they all sat easy and at home, in easy attitudes, affectionately listening. The room seemed somehow less dark and their forms much more visible and bigger. The empty white coffee cups standing about on the table caught the light. Miriam's stood alone at the end of the table. Mr. Bowdoin had taken

it from her but without entering into conversation and she was left with her prepared remark about the piano and her plea for a performance of the Tannhäuser overture going unsaid round and round in her mind. She sat ashamed before the restrained impersonal enthusiasm that filled the room. Even Miss Rogers was sitting less stiffly. Her own stiffness must make it obvious that she was not in a musical circle. Musical circles had a worldly savoir-faire of their own, the thing that was to be found everywhere in the world. To be in one would mean having to talk like that eager worshipping woman or to be calm and easily supercilious and secret like Miss Rogers. Even here the men were apart from the women ; to join the men would be easy enough, to say exactly what one thought and talk about all sorts of things and laugh. But the women would hate that and one would have to be intimate with the women, and rave about music and musicians. Mr. Bowdoin had probably thought she would talk to those women. But after talking to them how could one listen to music ? Their very presence made it almost impossible. She was unable to lose herself in the Wagner overture. It sounded out thinly into the room. Paderewski was looking

away to where there was nothing but music sounding in a wooden room just inside an immense forest somewhere in Europe. She began thinking secretly of the world waiting for her outside and felt that she was affronting everyone in the room ; treacherously and not visibly as before. She had got away from them but they did not know it. Mr. Bowdoin passed from the overture which was vociferously applauded and went on and on till she ceased altogether to try to listen and he became a stranger, sitting there playing seriously and laboriously alone at his piano. . . . She wished he would play a waltz — and she suddenly blushed to find herself sitting there at all. . . .

They all seemed to get up to go at the same moment and when they drifted out into the street seemed all to be going the same way. Miriam found herself walking along the Farringdon Road between Mr. Bowdoin and the shorter of the two other men, longing for solitude and to be free to wander slowly along the new addition to her map of London at night. Even with Bohemians evenings did not end when they ended, but led to the forced companionship of walking home. The tall man and the two women

were marching along ahead at a tremendous pace and she was obliged to hasten her steps to keep up with her companions' evident intention of keeping them in view. Perhaps at the top of the road they would all separate. We will escort Miss Henderson to her home and then I'll come on with you to Highgate. To *Highgate* — exclaimed Miriam almost stopping. Are you going to walk to Highgate *to-night*? They both laughed. Oh yes said Mr. Bowdoin that's nothing. *Highgate*. The mere thought of its northern remoteness seemed to be an insult to London. No wonder she had found herself a stranger with these people. Walking out to Highgate at night and getting up as usual the next morning. Magnificent strong hard thing to do. Horrible. Walking out to Highgate, "talking all the time" . . . they could never have a minute to realise anything at all; rushing along saying things that covered everything and never stopping to realise, talking *about* people and things and never being or knowing anything, and perpetually coming to the blank emptiness of *Highgate* . . . their unconsciousness of everything made them the right sort of people to have the trouble of living in Highgate. They probably walked about with

knapsacks on Sunday. But to them even the real country could not be country. All 'circles' must be like that in some way; doing things by agreement. The men talking confidently about them, *completely* ignorant of any sort of reality. . . . She came out of her musings when they turned into the Euston Road and ironically watched the men keeping up their talk across the continual breaking up of the group by passing pedestrians. *You'll* have to walk *back* she interrupted, suddenly turning to Mr. Bowdoin; the buses will have stopped. I never ride in omnibuses frowned Mr. Bowdoin. I shall be back by two. . . . Miriam waited a moment inside the door at Tansley Street listening for silence. The evening fell away from her with the departing footsteps of the two men. She opened the door upon the high quiet empty blue-lit street and moved out into a tranquil immensity. It was everywhere. Into her consciousness of the unpredictable incidents of tomorrow's Wimpole Street day, over the sure excitement of Eve's arrival in the evening flowed the light-footed leaping sense of a day new begun, an inexhaustible blissfulness, everything melted away into it. It seemed to smite her, calling for

some spoken acknowledgment of its presence, alive and real in the heart of the London darkness. It was not her fault that Eve was not coming to stay at Tansley Street. It came out of the way life arranged itself as long as you did not try to interfere. Roaming along in the twilight she lost consciousness of everything but the passage of dark silent buildings, the drawing away under her feet of the varying flags of the pavement, the waxing and waning along the pavement of the streams of lamp-light, the distant murmuring tide of sound passing through her from wide thoroughfares, the gradual approach of a thoroughfare, the rising of the murmuring tide to a happy symphony of recognisable noises, the sudden glare of yellow shop-light under her feet, the wide black road, the joy of the need for the understanding sweeping glance from right to left as she moved across it, the sense of being swept across in an easy curve drawn by the kindly calculable swing of the traffic, of being a permitted co-operating part of the traffic, the coming of the friendly curb and the strip of yellow pavement, carrying her on again into the lamplit greyness leading along to Donizetti's.



## CHAPTER VI

MIRIAM came forward seeing nothing but the golden gaslight pouring over the white table-cloth. She sat down near Mrs Bailey within the edge of its radiance. The depths of the light still held unchanged the welcome that had been there when she had come in and found Emile laying the table. There was no change and no disappointment. The smeary mirrors and unpolished furniture were bright in the gaslight, showing distances of interior and gleaming passages of light. In the spaces between the pictures the walls sent back sheeny reflections of the glow on the table. People coming in one by one saying good evening in different intonations and sitting down sending out waves of enquiry, left her undisturbed. There were five or six forms about the table besides Sissie sitting at the far end opposite her mother. They made sudden statements about the weather one after the other.

They were waiting to have their daily experience of the meal changed by something she might do or say. Emile was handing round plates of soup. Presently they would all be talking and would have forgotten her. Then she could see them all one by one and get away unseen, having had dinner only with Mrs. Bailey. Mrs. Bailey was standing up carving the joint. When the sounds she made were all that was to be heard, she responded to the last remark about the weather or asked some fresh question about it as if no one had spoken at all. When she was not speaking every movement of her battle with the joint expressed her triumphant affectionate sense of Miriam's presence. She had made no introductions. She was saying secretly there you are young lady. I told you so. Now you're in your right place. It's quite easy you see. The joint was already partly distributed. Emile was handing *three* piled dishes of vegetables. A generous plateful of well-browned meat and gravy appeared before Miriam with Mrs. Bailey's strong small toil-disfigured hand firmly grasping its edge. She took it to pass it on. Everything was hurrying on. . . . That's yorce my child said Mrs. Bailey. The low murmur was audible round the silent

table. Asserting her independence with a sullen formality Miriam thanked her and looked about for condiments without raising her eyes to the range of those other eyes, all taking photographs now that she was forced into movements. Mrs. Bailey placed a cruet near her plate. Yorce she pondered getting angrily away into thought. Mrs. Bailey *could* not know that it might be said to be more correct than *yourz*. It was an affectation. She had picked it up somewhere from one of those people who carefully say off-ten instead of awfen and it gave her satisfaction to use it, linked rebukingly up with the complacent motherly patronage of which she had boasted to the whole table. The first of Emile's dishes appeared over her left shoulder and she saw as she turned unprepared, raised heads turned towards her end of the table. She scooped her vegetables quickly and clumsily out of the dishes. In her awkward movements and her unprotected raised face she felt, and felt all the observers seeing, the marks of her disgrace. They saw her looking like Eve nervously helping herself to vegetables in the horrible stony cold dark restaurant of the hostel. They saw that she resented Mrs. Bailey's public familiarity and could do nothing. She tried to

look bored and murmured thank you when she had taken her third vegetable. It sounded out like a proclamation in the intense silence and she turned angrily to her plate trying to remember whether she had heard anyone else thank Emile for vegetables. . . . After all she was paying for the meal and her politeness to Emile was her own affair. Abroad people bowed or raised their hats going in and out of shops and said Monsieur to policemen. Her efforts to eat abstractedly and to appear plunged in thought made her feel more and more like a poor relation. The details of her meeting with Eve kept appearing in and out of her attempt to get back her sense of Mrs. Bailey's house as a secret warmth and brightness added to the many resources of her life. Mrs. Bailey knew that her house had been transformed by the meeting with Eve and was trying to tell her that she was not as independent as she thought.

What were the exact things she had told Mrs. Bailey? She had talked excitedly and scrappily and all the time Mrs. Bailey had been gathering information and drawing her own conclusions about the Hendersons. Mrs. Bailey saw Eve's arrival at the station and her weary resentment of

having everything done for her in the London manner, her revenge in the cab, sitting back and making the little abstracted patronising sounds in response to everything that was said to her, taking no interest, and at last saying *how* you run on. She saw something of the hostel. . . . .

Where's Mr. Mendizzable? demanded Sissie. . . . . 'The Girls' Friendly; that was the name of that other thing. But that was for servants. The Young Women's Bible Association was the worst disgrace that could happen to a gentlewoman. . . . Eve had liked it. She had suddenly begun going about with an interested revived face eagerly doing what she was told. She was there now, it was her only home, and she must have all her meals there for cheapness; there would be no outside life for her. Her life was imprisoned by those women, consciously goody conscientious servants with flat caps, dominating everything, revelling in the goody atmosphere; the young women in the sitting-room all looking *raw*, as if they washed very early in the morning in cold water and did their shabby hair with cold hands; the superintendent, the watchful official expression on her large well-fed elderly high-school-girl face, the *way* she sat on a footstool with her arms

round her knees pretending to be easy and jolly while she recited that it was a privilege and a joy for sisters to be so near to each other . . . . . as if she were daring us to deny it. I shan't see very much of Eve. She won't want me to. She will strike up a friendship with one of those young women. . . . Miriam found herself glancing up the table towards the centre of a conflict. They were all joined in conflict over some common theme. No one was outside it; the whole table was in an uproar of voices and laughter. . . . It was nothing but Miss Scott saying things about Mr. Mendizabal and everyone watching and throwing in remarks. . . . Miss Scott was neighing across the table at something that had been said and was preparing to speak again without breaking into her laughter. All faces were turned her way. "What's that Mr. Joe-anzen says?" laughed Mrs. Bailey towards the last speaker. The invisible man opposite Miss Scott was not even Mr. Helsing; only the younger fainter Norwegian, and this side of him an *extraordinary* person . . . . an abruptly bulging coarse fringe, a coarse-grained cheek bulging from under an almost invisible deep-sunken eye, and abruptly shelving bust under a coarse serge bodice.

“Mr. Yo-hanson says Mr. Mendy-zahble like n-gaiety.” Miriam glanced across the table. That was *all*. That little man with an adenoid voice and a narrow sniggering laugh that brought a flush and red spots all over his face, and shiny straight Sunday school hair watered and brushed flat, made up the party. Next to him was only Polly. Then came Miss Scott on Sissie’s left ; then Sissie and round the corner the Norwegian. Everyone looked dreadful in the harsh light, secret and secretly hostile to everyone else, unwilling to be there ; and even here though there was nothing and no one there was that everlasting conversational fussing and competition.

“Quite right,” hooted the bulky woman in a high pure girlish voice, “I doan blame ’im.”

Miriam turned towards the unexpectedness of her voice and sat helplessly observing. The serge sleeves were too short to cover her heavy red wrists ; her pudgy hands held her knife and fork broadside, like salad servers. Her hair was combed flatly up over her large skull and twisted into a tiny screw at the top just behind the bulge of her fringe. Could she possibly be a boarder ? She looked of far less consequence even than the

Baileys. Her whole person was unconsciously ill at ease, making one feel ashamed.

"Mrs. m-Barrow is another of 'em," said the little man with his eyebrows raised as he sniggered out the words.

"I *am* Mr. Gunna, I doan believe in go-an abate with a face like a fiddle."

Mr. Gunner's laughter flung back his head and sat him upright and brought him back to lean over his plate shaking noiselessly with his head sunk sideways between his raised shoulders as if he were dodging a blow. The eyes he turned maliciously towards Mrs. Barlow were a hard opaque pale blue. His lips turned outwards as he ate and his knife and fork had an upward tilt when at rest. Some of his spots were along the margin of his lips, altering their shape and making them look angry and sore. The eating part of his face was sullen and angry, not touched by the laughter that drew his eyebrows up and wrinkled his bent forehead and sounded only as a little click in his throat at each breath.

"There's plenty of glum folks abate," scolded Mrs. Barlow.

Miriam was aware that she was recoiling visibly, and tried to fix her attention on her meal. Mrs.



Bailey was carving large second helpings and Emile's vegetable dishes had been refilled. None of these people thought it extraordinary that there should be all this good meal and a waiter, every day . . . . it would be shameful to come again for the sake of the meal, feeling hostile. Besides, it would soon be unendurable; they would be aware of criticisms and would resent them. The only way to be able to come would be to pretend to laugh at remarks about people and join in discussions on opinions about cheerfulness and seriousness and winter and summer. They would not know that one was not sincere. They were perfectly sincere in their laughter and talk. They all had some sort of common understanding, even when they disagreed. It was the same everlasting problem again, the way people took everything for granted. They would be pleased, would turn and like one if one could say heartily *isn't* he a funny little man, mts, my *word*, or well I don't see anything particularly funny about him, or *oh*, give me the *summer*. But if one did that one would presently be worn and strained with lying, left with an empty excitement, while they went serenely on their way, and the reality that was there when one first sat down with them

would have gone. Always and always in the end there was nothing but to be alone. And yet it needed people in the world to make the reality when one was alone. Perhaps just these uninterfering people, when one had forgotten their personal peculiarities and had only the consciousness of them in the distance. . . . . One might perhaps then wonder sometimes longingly what they were saying about the weather. But to be *obliged* to meet them daily. . . . She chided herself for the scathing glance she threw at the unconscious guests. Gunner was smiling sideways down the table again prepared to execute his laugh when he should have caught an eye and sent his grin home. Miriam almost prayed that nothing should provoke him again to speech. During a short silence she cleared her throat elaborately to cover the sound of his eating. Several voices broke out together, but Mrs. Bailey was suddenly saying something privately to her. She raised her head towards the bright promise and was aware of Mr. Gunner thoughtful and serene. There was a pleasant intelligence somewhere about his forehead. If only she could think his head clear and cool and not have to hear again the hot dull hollow resonance of his voice

how joyfully she would be listening to Mrs. Bailey. I've got a very special message for you young lady she had said and now went on with her eye on the conflict at the end of the table into which Mr. Gunner was throwing comments and exclamations from afar. The room beamed softly in its golden light. From the heart of the golden light Mrs. Bailey was hurrying towards her with good tidings.

"*Hah.*" . . . .

Mrs. Bailey looked round cloaking her vexation in a bridling smile as Mr. Mendizabal came in sturdily beaming. He sat down amidst the general outcry and Emile busied himself to lay him a place. He shouted answers to everyone, sitting with his elbows on the table. Putting her elbows on the table Mrs. Bailey applauded with little outbursts of laughter. She had dropped the idea of delivering her message. Miriam finished her pudding hurriedly. The din was increasing. No one was aware of her. Cautiously rising she asked Mrs. Bailey to excuse her. You go Miss? shouted Mr. Mendizabal suddenly looking her way. He looked extraordinary, not himself.

Eve's shop was a west-end blaze of flowers. The window was blocked with flowers in jars, tied up in large bundles. In front were gilt baskets of hot-house flowers. Propped in the middle were a large flower anchor and a flower horseshoe, both trimmed with large bows of white satin ribbon—women in white satin evening dresses with trains, bowing from platforms—on either side were tight dance buttonholes pinned on to heart-shaped velvet mounts.

It was strange to be able to go in. . . . Going in to see an employee was not the right way to go into a west-end shop. . . . There *was* Eve ; standing badly in a droopy black dress on a bare wet wooden floor. Cut flowers in stone jam pots, masses of greenery lying on a wet table. Hulloh aren't your *feet* wet demanded Miriam irritably. Eve started and turned, looking. She was exhausted and excited, grappling dreamily with abrupt instructions with a conservatory smell competing with them ; trying to become part of a clever arrangement to collect the conservatory smell for sale. She stepped slenderly forward ; all her old Eve manner, but determined

to guard against disturbance ; making sounds without speaking, and the faint shape of a tired smile. She was worn out with the fatigue of trying to make herself into something else, but liking and determined not to be reminded of other things. Even her hair seemed to be changed. Full of pictures of Eve, gracefully dressed and with piled brown hair Miriam's eyes passed in fury over the skimpy untidy sham shop-assistant, beginning a failure defensively, *imagining* behind it that she was taking hold of London. . . . . Won't you catch *cold*? You get used to it mouthed Eve nervously turning her head away and waiting, fumbling a scattered spray of smilax. Eve had always loved smilax. Did it seem the same to her now? Fancy *you* said Miriam, in all this damp. They were both miserable and Eve was not going to put it right. All her strength and interest was for this new thing. Do you like it? said Miriam beginning again. Yes awfully flushed Eve looking as if she were going to cry. It was too late. I suppose its awfully interesting asked Miriam formally, opening a conversation with a stranger. Mps said Eve warmly I simply love it. It makes you frightfully tired at first, but I find I can do things I never

dreamed I could. I don't *mind* standing in the wet a bit now. You have to if you're obliged to. Eve was *liking* hardness imposed by other people. *Liking* the prices of her new life. Accepting them without resentment. People would despise and like her for that. Perhaps she would succeed in staying on if her strength did not give way. Her graceful dresses and leisurely brown hair going further and further away. . . . . Do you *serve*? Ssh. I'm learning to. Eve would not look, and wanted her to be gone. I'm free for lunch said Miriam snappily, holding to the disappearing glory of her first coming out into London in the middle of a week-day. Eve should have guessed and stopped being anything but Eve being taken out to lunch. We could go to an A.B.C. Oh I can't come *out* murmured Eve ignoringly.

## 3

Miriam ordered another cup of coffee and went on reading. There was plenty of time. Eve would not appear at Tansley Street until half-past. In looking up at the clock she had become aware of detailed people grouped at tables. She plunged back into Norway, reading on and on.

Each line was wonderful ; but all in a darkness. Presently on some turned page something would shine out and make a meaning. It went on and on. It seemed to be going towards something. But there was nothing that *anyone* could imagine, nothing in life or in the world that could make it clear from the beginning, or bring it to an end. If the man died the author might stop. Finis. But it would not make any difference to anything. She turned the pages backwards re-reading passages here and there. She could not remember having read them. Looking forward to portions of the dialogue towards the end of the book she found them familiar ; as if she had read them before . . . . . she read them intently. They had more meaning read like that, without knowing to what they were supposed to refer. They were the *same*, read alone in scraps, as the early parts. It was all one book in some way, not through the thoughts, or the story, but something in the author. People who talked about the book probably understood the strange thoughts and the puzzling hinting story that began and came to an end and left everything as it was before. The author did not seem to suggest that you should be sorry. He seemed to know that at the

end everything was as before, with the mountains all round. . . . . The electric lights flashed out all over the A.B.C. at once. . . . . Miriam remained bent low over her book. Only you had been in Norway, in a cottage up amongst the mountains and out in the open. She read a scene at random and another and began again and read the first scene through and then the last. It was all the *same*. You might as well begin at the end. . . . . In *Norway*, up among the misty mountains, in farms and cottages looking down on fiords with glorious scenery about them all the time are people, sitting in the winter by fires and worrying about right and wrong. They *wonder* but more gravely and clearly than we do. Torrents thunder in their ears and they can see mountains all the time even when they are indoors. "Ibsen's *Brand*" is about all those worrying things, in magnificent scenery. You are *in Norway* while you read. That is why people read books by geniuses and look far-away when they talk about them. They know they have been somewhere you cannot go without reading the book. . . . . *Brand*. You are in the strangeness of Norway — and then there are people saying things that might be said anywhere.



But with something going in and out of the words all the time. Ibsen's genius. You can't understand it or see where it is. Each sentence looks so ordinary, making you wonder what it is all about. But taking you somewhere, to stay, forgetting everything, until it is finished. An hour ago Ibsen was just a name people said in a particular way, a difficult wonderful mystery, and *improper*. Why do people say he is improper? He is exactly like everyone else, thinking and worrying about the same things. But putting them down in a background that is more real than people or thoughts. The life in the background is in the people. He does not know this. Why did he write it? A book by a genius is alive. That is why "Ibsen" is superior to novels; because it is not quite about the people or the thoughts. There is something else; a sort of lively freshness all over even the saddest parts, preventing your feeling sorry for the people. Everyone ought to know. It ought to be on the omnibuses and in the menu. All these people fussing about not knowing of Ibsen's Brand. A volume, bound in a cover. Alive. Precious. What *is* Genius? Something that can take you into Norway in an A.B.C.

She wandered out into Oxford Street. There was a vast fresh gold-lit sky somewhere behind the twilight. Why did Ibsen sit down in Norway and write plays? Why did people say Ibsen as if it were the answer to something? Walking along Oxford Street with a read volume of Ibsen held against you is walking along with something precious between two covers which makes you know you are rich and free. . . . . She wandered on and on in an expansion of everything that passed into her mind out and out towards a centre in Norway. She wondered whether Ibsen were still alive. A vast beautiful Norway and a man writing his thoughts in a made-up play. Genius. People go about saying Ibsen's Brand as if it were the *answer* to *something* and Ibsen knows no more than anyone else. . . . . She arrived at Tansley Street as from a great distance, suddenly wondering about her relationship with the sound of carts and near footfalls. Mrs. Bailey was standing in the doorway seeing someone off. *Eve*. Forgotten. I couldn't get here before; I'm *so* sorry. Mrs. Bailey had disappeared. Eve stepped back into the hall and stood serenely glowing in the half-light. Are you going? I must, in a minute. Eve was looking

sweet ; slenderly beautiful and with her crimson-rose bloom ; shy and indulgent and unenviously admiring as she had been at home ; and Mrs. Bailey had been having it all. Can't you come upstayers ? Not this time ; I'll come again some time. Well ; you must just tell me ; wot you been doing ? Talking to Mrs. Bailey ? Yes. Eve had been flirting with Mrs. Bailey ; perhaps talking about religion. Isn't she funny ? I *like* her ; she's perfectly *genuine*, she means what she says and really *likes* people. Yes ; I know. Isn't it funny ? I don't think it's funny ; it's very beautiful and rare. Would you like to be here always ? Yes ; I could be always with Mrs. Bailey. Every day of your life for ever and ever ? *Rather*. Yes ; I know. And y'know there are all *sorts* of interesting people. I wish you lived here Eve. Eve glanced down wisely smiling and moved slenderly towards the door. What about Sunday ? Couldn't you come round for a long time ? No breathed Eve restrainingly, I'm going to *Sallies*. All Eve's plans were people. She moved, painfully, through things, from person to person.

## 4

Dr. Hurd held the door wide for Miriam to pass out and again his fresh closely knit worn brick-red face was deeply curved by the ironically chuckling hilarious smile with which he had met the incidents of the "awful German language." That of the *fatherland*, the happy *fatherland*, nearly *dislocates* my *jaw* she could imagine him heartily and badly singing with a group of Canadian students. She smiled back at him without saying anything, rapidly piecing together the world that provoked his inclusive deeply carved smiles ; himself, the marvellous little old country he found himself in as an incident of the business of forcing himself to be a doctor, his luck in securing an accomplished young English lady to prepare him for the struggle with the great medical world of Germany ; his triumphant chuckling satisfaction in getting in first before the other fellows with an engagement to take her out. . . . The grandeur of this best bedroom of Mrs. Bailey was nothing to him. The room was just a tent in his wanderings. . . . For the moment he was going to take a young lady to a concert. That was how he saw it. He was a

simple boyish red-haired open extension of Dr. von Heber. When she found herself out in the large grime and gloom of the twilit landing she realised that he had lifted her far further than Dr. von Heber into Canada ; he was probably more Canadian. The ancient gloom of the house was nothing to him, he would get nothing of the quality of England in his personal life there, only passing glimpses from statements in books and in the conversation of other people. He did not see her as part of it all in the way Dr. von Heber had done talking at the table that night and wanting to talk to her because she was part of it. He saw her as an accomplished young lady, but a young lady like a Canadian young lady and a fellow was a fool if he did not arrange to take her out quick before the other fellows. But there was nothing in it but just that triumph. " I'll get a silk hat before Sunday " ; he would prepare for her to go all the way down to the Albert Hall as a young lady being taken to a concert ; the Albert Hall on Sunday was brass bands ; he thought they were a concert. His world was thin and open ; but the swift sunlit decision and freedom of his innocent reception of her in his bedroom lifted the dingy brown house of her long memories into

a new background. She was to be fêted, in an assumed character and whether she liked it or no. The four strange men in the little back sitting room were her competing friends, the friends of all nice young ladies. He was the one who had laughed the laugh she had heard in the hall, of course. They never appeared but somehow they had got to know of her and had their curious baseless set ways of thinking and talking about her. Being doctors and still students they ought to be the most hateful and awful kind of men in relation to women, thinking and believing all the horrors of medical science ; the hundred golden rules of gynæcology ; if they had been Englishmen they would have gone about making one want to murder them ; but they did not ; Dr. Hurd was studying gyn'kahl'jy, but he did not apply its ugly lies to life ; to Canadians women were people . . . but they were all the *same* people to Dr. Hurd.

## 5

That evening both Dr. Heber and Dr. Hurd appeared at dinner. Mrs. Bailey tumultuously arranged them opposite each other to her

right and left. Miriam could not believe they were going to stay until they sat down. She retreated to the far end of the table taking her place on Sissie's right hand, separated from Dr. von Heber by the thin Norwegian and the protruding bulk of Mrs. Barrow. Mr. Mendizabal with a pencil and paper at the side of his plate was squarely opposite to her. His *méfiant* sallies to the accompaniment of Sissie's giggles and Miss Strong's rapid sarcastic remarks, made a tumult hiding her silence. She heard nothing of the various conversations sprouting easily all round the table. The doctors were far-off strongholds of serenity, unconscious of their serenity, unconscious of her and of their extraordinary taking of the Baileys and Mr. Gunner for granted. . . . . Dr. von Heber was a silence broken by small courteously curving remarks. Dr. Hurd laughed his leaping delighted laugh in and out of an unmeditated interchange with Mr. Gunner and Mrs. Bailey. If she had been at their end of the table they would not have perceived her thoughts, but they would have felt her general awareness and got up at last disliking her. They changed the atmosphere but could not make her forget the underlying unchanged

elements nor rid her of her resentment of their unconsciousness of them. There was a long interval before the puddings appeared. Mrs. Bailey was trying to answer questions about books. Dr. Hurd did not care for reading, but liked to be read to, by his sisters, in the evening, and had come away, at the most exciting part of a book . . . . . a wonderful authoress, what's her name now — — Rosie — — Newchet. . . . He was just longing to know how it ended. Was it sweet and wonderful, or too dreadful for anything to contemplate a student, a fully qualified doctor having Rosa Nouchette Carey read to him by his sisters? Dr. von Heber was not joining in. Did he read novels and like them? No one had anything to say; no one here knew even of Rosa Nouchette Carey . . . . . and that man Hunter . . . he's great . . . . he's father's favourite; what's this, Mr Barnes of New York. . . . Archibald Clavering Gunter said Miriam suddenly, longing to be at the other end of the table. Beg pardon? said Sissie turning aside for a moment from watching Mr. Mendizabal's busy pencil. There he is shouted Mr. Mendizabal flinging out his piece of paper — gastric ulcer — there he is. There was a drawing of a sort of crab with huge



claws. — My beautiful gastric ulcer — Have you been to the ospital to-day Mr. Mendizzable asked Mrs. Bailey through the general laughter. I have been madame and I come away. They say they welcome me inside again soon. *Je me'en fiche.* The faces of both doctors were turned enquiringly. Dr. Hurd's look of quizzical sympathy passed on towards Miriam and became a mask of suppressed hysterical laughter. Perhaps he and Dr. Heber would scream and yell together afterwards and make a great story of a man in a London pension. Dr. Hurd would call him a *cure*. My word isn't that chap a *cure*? Brave little man. Caring for nothing. How could he possibly have a gastric ulcer and look so hard and happy and strong. *What* was Dr. von Heber silently thinking? The doctors disappeared as soon as dinner was over, Dr. von Heber gravely rounding the door with some quiet formal phrases of politeness, and the group about the table broke up. He's a bit pompous Mr. Gunner was saying presently to someone from the hearth-rug. Was he daring to speak of Dr. von Heber? Presently there were only the women left in the room. Miriam felt unable to depart and hung about until the table was cleared and sat down

under the gas protected by her notebook. The room was very quiet. Sissie and Mrs. Bailey were mending near a lamp at the far end of the table. Miriam's thoughts left her suddenly. The tide of life had swept away leaving an undisturbed stillness, a space swept clear. She was empty and nothing. In all the clamour that had passed she had no part. In all the noise that lay ahead, no part. Strong people came and went and never ceased, coming and going and acting ceaselessly, coming and going, and here, at her centre, was nothing, lifeless thoughtless nothingness. The four men studied apart in the little room, away from the empty lifeless nothingness . . . . the door opened quietly. Mrs. Bailey and Sissie looked expectantly up and were silent. Something had come into the room. Something real, clearing away the tumult and compelling peaceful silence. She exerted all her force to remain still and apparently engrossed, as Dr. von Heber placed an open notebook and a large volume on the table exactly opposite to where she sat and sat down. He did not see that she was astonished at his coming nor her still deeper astonishment in the discovery of her unconscious certainty that he would come. A haunting

familiar sense of unreality possessed her. Once more she was part of a novel; it was right, true like a book, for Dr. Heber to come in in defiance of everyone, bringing his studies into the public room in order to sit down quietly opposite this fair young English girl. He saw her apparently gravely studious and felt he could 'pursue his own studies' all the better for her presence. She began writing at random, assuming as far as possible the characteristics he was reading into her appearance. If only it were true; but there was not in the whole world the thing he thought he saw. Perhaps if he remained steadily like that in her life she could grow into some semblance of his steady reverent observation. He did not miss any movement or change of expression. Perhaps you need to be treated as an object of romantic veneration before you can become one. Perhaps in Canada there were old-fashioned women who *were* objects of romantic veneration all their lives, living all the time as if they were Maud or some other woman from Tennyson. It *was* glorious to have a real, simple homage coming from a man who was no simpleton, coming simple, strong and kindly from Canada to put you in a shrine. . . . I have always liked those old-

fashioned stories because I have always known they were *true*. They have lived on in Canada. Canadian men have kept something that Englishmen are losing. She turned the pages of her notebook and came upon the scrap crossed through by Mr. Mendizabal. She read the words through forcing them to accept a superficial meaning. Disturbance about ideas would destroy the perfect serenity that was demanded of her. Be good sweet maid and let who will be clever. Easy enough if one were perpetually sustained by a strong and adoring hand. Perhaps more difficult really to be good than to be clever. Perhaps there were things in this strong man that were not perfectly good and serene. He exacted his own serenity by sheer force; that was why he worshipped and looked for natural serenity. . . . . Presently she stirred from her engrossment and looked across at him as if only just aware of his presence. He did not meet her look but a light came on his face and he raised his head and turned towards the light to aid her observation. The things that are beginning to be called silly futile romances are true. Here *is* the strong silent man who does not want to talk and grin. . . . . He would love laughter. Freed from worries and

sustained by him one could laugh all one's laughter out and dance and sing through life to a happy sunsetting. . . . . Was he *religious*? She found she had risen to her feet with decision and began collecting her papers in confusion as if she had suddenly made a great clamour. Dr. Heber rose at once and with some quiet murmuring remark went away from the room. Miriam felt she must get into the open and go far on and on and on. Going upstairs through the house and into her room for her outdoor things she found her own secret belongings more her own. In the life she shyly glanced at, out away somewhere in the bright blaze of Canadian sunshine her own secret belongings would be more her own. That was one of the secrets of the sheltered life . . . . . one of the things behind the smiles of the sheltered women; their own secret certainties intensified because they were surrounded; perhaps in Canada men respected the secret certainties of women which they could never share. With your feet on that firm ground what would it matter how life went on and on? There was someone in the hall. Mr. Mendizabal in a funny little short overcoat.

"You go out Miss?" he said cheerfully.

"I'm going for a walk," she said eagerly, her eyes on the clear grey and black of the hat he was taking from the hall stand.

"I too go for a walk" he murmured cramming the soft hat on to his resisting hair and opening the door for her.

## 6

This was one of those *mild* February days ; it is a mistake to imagine that the winter is gone ; but it is gone in your mind ; you can see ahead two summers and only one winter. I go with you was meant as a question. . . . It was on the tip of her tongue to turn and say you should have said shall I go with you ; she was rebuked by a glimpse of Mr. Mendizabal swinging sturdily unconsciously along on the gutter side of the narrow width of pavement, swinging his stick, the strong modelling of his white face unconscious under his strong black hair and the jaunty sweep of his black banded grey hat. "Jaunty and debonair" ; but without a touch of weakness. What a lovely *mild* evening ; extraordinary for the time of year ; he would be furious at being interrupted for that, thinking of her as a stiff

formal institutrice and shouting something ironic that would bring the world about their ears. Quel beau temps ; that was it.

“ Quel *beau temps*.” They had reached the Gower Street curb and stood waiting to plunge through the passing traffic.

“ Une soirée superbe mademoiselle ” shouted Mr. Mendizabal in a smooth flattened squeal as they crossed side by side ; “ hah-eh ! ” he squealed pushing her off to dart clear of a hansom and away to the opposite curb. Miriam pulled back just in time, receiving the angry yell of the driver full in her upturned face. Mr. Mendizabal was waiting unconcernedly outside the chemist’s, singing, with French words. She disposed hastily of the incident, eager to be walking on through the darkness towards the mingled darkness and gold of the coming streets. They went along past the grey heights of University College Hospital, separate creatures of mysteriously different races ; she expected that when they reached the light she would find herself alone — and swung with one accord round into the brilliance of the Tottenham Court Road ; the tide of light and sound raising them into a companionship that needed no bending into shapes of conversation. It was something

to him and it was something to her, and they threaded their way together, meeting and separating and rejoining, unanimous and apart. We are both *battleurs des pavés*, she thought; both people who must be free to be nothing; saying to everything *je m'en fiche* . . . . the hushed happiness that had begun in the dining-room half an hour ago seized her again suddenly, sending her forward almost on tiptoe. It was securely there; the vista it opened growing in beauty as she walked. There was some source of light within her, something that was ready to spread out all round her and ahead and flow over the past. It confirmed scenes she had read and wondered at and cherished, seeking in vain in the world for women who were like the women described in them. She understood what women in books meant by *sacred* "It is all too sacred for words." There was no choice in all that; only secret and sacred beauty; unity with all women who had felt in the same way; the freedom of following certainties. Outside it was this other elf untouched and always new, her old free companion attending to no one. She tossed Mr. Mendizabal shreds of German or French whenever the increasing throng of passing pedestrians



allowed them to walk for a moment side by side.

His apparent oblivion of her incoherence gave full freedom to her delight in her collection of idioms and proverbs. Each one flung out with its appropriate emphasis and the right foreign intonation gave her a momentary change of personality. He caught the shreds and returned them woven into phrases increasing her store of convincing foreignness, comfortably, from the innocence of his polyglot experience, requiring no instructive contribution from her, reassuringly assuming her equal knowledge, his conscious response being only to her joyousness, his eyes wide ahead, his features moulded to gaiety. The burden of her personal dinginess and resourcelessness in a strong resourceful world was hidden by him because he was not aware of dinginess and resourcelessness anywhere. Dingy and resourceless she wandered along keeping as long as her scraps of convincing impersonation should hold out, to her equal companionship with his varied experience; bearing within her in secret unfathomable abundance the gift of ideal old-English rose and white gracious adorable womanhood given her by Dr. Heber. At the turning

into Oxford Street they lost each other. Miriam wandered in solitude amidst jostling bodies. The exhausted air rang with lifeless strident voices in shoutings and heavy thick flattened unconcerned speech ; even from above a weight seemed to press. Clearer space lay ahead ; but it was the clear space of Oxford Street and pressed upon her without ray or break. Once it had seemed part of the golden west-end ; but Oxford Street was not the west-end. It was more lifeless and hopeless than even the north of London ; more endurable because life was near at hand. Oxford Street was like a prison . . . . the embarrassment of her enterprise came upon her suddenly ; the gay going off was at an end ; perhaps she might get away and back home alone up a side street. Amidst the shouting of women and the interwoven dark thick growlings of conversations she heard Mr. Mendizabal's ironic snorting laugh not far behind her. Glancing round from the free space of darkness she had reached she saw him emerge shouldering from a group of women, short and square and upright and gleaming brilliantly with the remains of his laughter. A furious wrath flickered over her. He came forward with his eyes ahead unseeing, nearer,

near, safe at her side, *her* little foreign Mr. Mendizabal, mild and homely.

Here is Ruscino's mademoiselle, *allons*, we will go to Ruscino *allons* ! Ruscino, in electric lights round the top of the little square portico, like the name of a play round the portico of a theatre, the sentry figure of the commissionaire, the passing glimpse of palm ferns standing in semi-darkness just inside the portico, the darkness beyond, suddenly became a place, separate and distinct from the vague confusion of it in her mind with the Oxford Music Hall ; offering itself, open before her, claiming to range itself in her experience ; open, with her inside and the mysteries of the portico behind . . . . continental London ahead of her, streaming towards her in mingled odours of continental food and wine, rich intoxicating odours in an air heavy and parched with the flavour of cigars, throbbing with the solid, filmy thrilling swing of music. It was a café ! Mr. Mendizabal was evidently a habitué. She could be, by right of her happiness abroad. She was here as a foreigner, all her English friends calling her back from a spectacle she could not witness without contamination. Only Gerald knew the spectacle of Ruscino's.

“Lord, Ruscino’s; *Lord*” . . . . . In a vast open space of light, set in a circle of balconied gloom, innumerable little tables held groups of people wreathed in a brilliancy of screened light, veiled in mist, clear in sharp spaces of light, clouded by drifting spirals of smoke. They sat down at right angles to each other at a little table under the central height. The confines of the room were invisible. All about them were worldly wicked happy people.

## 7

She could understand a life that spent all its leisure in a café; every day ending in warm brilliance, forgetfulness amongst strangers near and intimate, sharing the freedom and forgetfulness of the everlasting unchanging café, all together in a common life. It was like a sort of dance, everyone coming and going poised and buoyant, separate and free, united in freedom. It was a heaven, a man’s heaven, most of the women were there with men, somehow watchful and dependent, but even they were forced to be free from troublings and fussings whilst they were

there . . . . the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest . . . . she was there as a man, a free man of the world, a continental, a cosmopolitan, a connoisseur of women. That old man sitting alone with a grey face and an extinguished eye was the end of it, but even now the café held him up ; he would come till death came too near to allow him movement. He was horrible, but less horrible than he would be alone in a room ; he had to keep the rules and manage to behave ; as long as he could come he was still in life. . . . White muslin wings on a black straw hat, a well-cut check costume and a carriage, bust forward, an elegant carriage imposing secrets and manners. . . . Miriam turned to watch her proceeding with a vague group of people through the central light towards the outer gloom. *Voilà une petite qui est jolie* she remarked judicially. — *Une jeune fille avec ses parents* — rebuked Mr. Mendizabal. Even he, wicked fast little foreigner did not know how utterly meaningless his words were. He was here, in Ruscino's quite simply. He sat at home, at the height of his happy foreign expansiveness. He had no sense of desperate wickedness. He gave no help to the sense of desperate wickedness ;

pouring like an unacceptable nimbus from his brilliant strong head was a tiresome homeliness. She flung forth to the music, the shining fronds of distant palm ferns ; sipped her liqueur with downcast eyes and thought of an evening along the digue at Ostend, the balmy air, the telescoping brilliant interiors of the villas, the wild arm-linked masquerading stroll, Elsie had really looked like an unprincipled Bruxelloise . . . . foreigners were all innocent in their depravity. . . . To taste the joy of depravity one must be English. . . . Hah ; Strelinsky ! Ça va bien, hein ? A figure had risen out of the earth at Mr. Mendizabal's elbow and stood looking down at him ; another foreigner. She glanced with an air of proprietorship ; a slender man in a thin faded grey overcoat, a sharp greyish yellow profile and small thin head under a dingy grey felt hat. Strelinsky. Mr. Mendizabal stood sturdily up bowing with square outstretched hand, wrapped in the radiating beam of his smile. I present you Mr. Strelinsky. A musician. A composer of music. His social manner was upon him again ; fatherliness, strong responsible hard-working kindness. The face under the grey hat turned slowly towards her. She bowed and looked into

eyes set far back in the thin mask of the face. Her eyes passed a question from the expressionless eyes to the motionless expressionless face. How could he be a composer; looking so . . . . vanishing? Strelinsky . . . . Morceau pour piano . . . that must be *he* standing here; did you write this she said abruptly and hummed the beginning. It sounded shapeless and toneless, but there was a little tune just ahead. She broke off short of it not sure that he was attending; the world burst into laughter; his face turned slowly and stopped looking downwards across her, his eyes fixed in a dead repetition of the laughter in which she was drowning. He stood in space in a faded coat and hat, a colourless figure clothed by her feebleness in lively dignity and wisdom . . . . . grouped inaccessibly beyond the vast space were solid tables filled with judges; dim figures stood in judgment in the amber light under the gallery where palms stood; she was drowning alone, surrounded by a distant circle of palms. Eleven. We must go miss stated Mr. Mendizabal cordially. Miriam rose. The tide of café life flowed all round her. She wandered blissfully out through the misty smoke-wreathed golden light, threading her way amongst the

tables towards the black and gold of the streets. Far away behind her, staying in the evening, Strelinsky blocked the view, moving, fixed aver- tedly, with eyes in his shoulders along an endless narrowing distance of café.



## CHAPTER VII

MIRIAM found her old prayer-book and scribbled her name on the flyleaf. . . . . Bella de Castro writing *from mother* under her name in her bible . . . . . *feeling* something, privately, not knowing that anyone would see it. . . . . The sunlight pouring in on the thin bible page ; the words written plumply with one of Bella's blunt uncared-for pencils. Her thick ropy black plait, brilliant oily Italian eyes in her long fat handsome face ; staring out of the window sullenly waiting for schooldays to be at an end ; her handsome horrible brother on horse-back ; just the same ; the high-water marks above her wrists when she washed her hands, and then, from mother, stubbed carefully, *meaning*.

The pencilled *Miriam* gave a false meaning to the prayer-book. There was no indiarubber, she would have to take it down as it was. It was a letter, written to Dr. von Heber, supposed to be written when she was a girl. . . . . She carried

the book downstairs. The Baileys were still sitting by the fire with their backs to Dr. von Heber standing alone in the twilight in the middle of the room. She came forward, handing the book stiffly and sat busily down to the piano again, angrily recording his quiet formal thanks and silent swift departure. She began playing where she had left off ; telling Dr. von Heber as he went downstairs that he had come up and made a scene and interrupted her ; that her chosen evening was to sit, with the Baileys, playing the piano ; that she was not a church-goer.

He had come so suddenly ; after so long ; if she had not been so lost in the disappointing evening she would have been ready. If she had not suddenly been so prepared, so rushing forward and feeling after he had spoken as if the words had been long ago and they had been to church together and come back before all the world there would not have been in his voice the reproachful affronted anticipation of her stupidity.

Perhaps he had really suddenly thought downstairs that it would be nice to go to church, not knowing that that was one of the real effects of falling in love . . . . just thinking in the course

of his worldly studies that there was church and he was in himself a church-goer and ought to go more often and coming up to borrow a prayer-book from the *Baileys*. No. Suddenly in the room, standing in the unknown drawing-room for the first time in his steady urbane confident way, waiting, a little turned towards the piano. The Baileys had neither spoken nor moved ; they were afraid of him ; but Mrs. Bailey would have made herself say, Well, doctor, to the amazing apparition. They simply waited, held off by his waiting manner. “ *I think this is a good evening to go to church.*” What have you been doing all this time ? Where do you go, going out so often ? What are you doing sitting here playing ? We ought to be going to church ; we two. Here I am professing church-going and idiotically confessing myself come all the way from Canada without a prayer-book and making a pretence of borrowing your prayer-book because we *must* be in church together. Dr. Hurd’s impressions had had no effect upon him. . . . But now he had gone back into his own life not only thinking that she was not a church-goer, but feeling sure that her own private life of coming and going had no thoughts of him in it.

Dr. Hurd sitting on the omnibus with *amusement* carving deep lines on his brick-red face and splintering out of his eyes into the hot afternoon glare ; the neat new bowler with the red hair coming down underneath it, the well-cut Montreal clothes on his tough neat figure ; immovable, there for the afternoon. Forced to go on and on isolated with the brick-red grin and the splintering green eyes through the afternoon heat, in the midst of a glare of omnibus people, on their way to a brass band in the Albert Hall, thinking they were going to a *concert*. He did not know what made a concert. Sitting with the remains of his grin, waiting for the things he had been taught to admire, unable to find anything without his mother and sisters ; missing Canadian ladies with opinions about everything ; waiting all the time to be managed in the Canadian women's way. . . . . He must have told the others about it afterwards, his face crinkling at them and they listening and agreeing.

It had begun the moment after he had suggested the concert. I'll get a new top hat before then. The awful demand for a jest. His way of waiting as if one were some queer being he was

waiting to see say or do something anyone could understand was the same as the English way only more open. But English people like that did not care for music and did not have books read to them. Perhaps his parents belonged to the other sort of English and he had the stamp of it, promising seriousness and a love of beautiful things, and forced by life into the jesting way of worldly people who seemed to have no sacred patches at all. Quick words, bathed in laughter heaped up into a questioning of what the *matter* was. Men, demanding jests and amusement; women succeeding only by jesting satirically about everything.

Von Heber's a man who'll *carve* his way. . . . .  
My. He's *great*. Carve his way; one of those phrases that satisfy and worry you; short, and leaving out nearly everything; Dr. von Heber going through life with a chisel, intent on carving; everybody envying him; the von Heber not seen or realised; his way is carved, he *is* his way . . . . . going ahead further and further away as one listened. His poverty and drudgery behind him, at Winnipeg, amongst the ice. Hoisting himself out of it, *making* himself into a doctor; a graduate of "McGill" . . . . . standing out among the

graduates with even the very manner of success more marked in him than in them with their money and ease; sailing to England steady-minded in the awful risk of borrowed money . . . . its wrong, insulting to him to think of it while he is still in the midst of the effort . . . . a sort of treachery to know the details at all . . . . the *impossibility* of not dwelling on them. But thinking disperses his general effect. In the strength and sunshine of him there is power. The things he has done are the power in him; no need to know the gossip details; that was why the facts sounded so familiar; reproachful, as Dr. Hurd brought them out. . . .

I knew *all* about him when I met his sunshine. I ought to have rushed away garlanded with hawthorn, with some woman, and waited till he came again. Dr. Hurd looks like an old woman; an old gossip. Old men are worse gossips than old women. They can't keep their hands off. They make phrases. Dr. Hurd is a dead, dead old woman. Handling things like an old man. It was so natural to listen. 'Natural' things get you lost and astray . . . . kiss-in-the-ring 'just a little harmless nonsense . . . there's no harm in a little gay nonsense chickie.' There's no such

thing as harmless nonsense. Dissipation makes you forget everything. Secret sacred places. George and John faithful and steady can't make those. They smile *personally* and the room or the landscape is immediately silly and tame. . . .

"I never met a chap who could make so much of what he knows . . . . pick up . . . . and bring them out better than the chap could himself." The four figures sitting in the little room round the lamp. Dr. Hurd talking his gynæcology simply; a relief, a clear clean place in the world of women's doctors. . . . Dr. Winchester talking for Dr. von Heber, his brown beard and his frock-coat just for the time he was talking before Dr. von Heber had grasped it all, looking like a part of the professional world. Dr. Wayne-flete's white criminal face his little white mouth controlledly mouthing . . . Wayneflete's brilliant; but he's not got von Heber's strength nor his manner. He's quiet though that chap . . . . he'd do well over here . . . . that spreads your thoughts about, painfully and wholesomely. Dr. Hurd spreads his thoughts about quite simply. . . .

The moment was so surprising that I forgot it.

I always forget the things that surprise me. She was hating me and hating everything. I must have told her I was going away. When I said you can have Bunnikin back she suddenly grew older than I. "Oh *Bunnikin*." Their beloved Bunnikin, as smartly dressed as Mrs. Corrie, in the smart country house way and knowing how to gush and behave. . . . "Bunnikin's too *simple*." Sybil in her blue cotton overall in the amber light in the Louis Quinze drawing-room, one with me, wanting me because I was not simple. . . . I thought she hated me all the time because I was not worldly. I should not have known I was not simple unless she had told me ; that child.

. . . . . Dear Mr. Bowdoin . . . . . and I think I can promise you an audience . . . . . I regret that I cannot come on Thursday and I am sincerely sorry that you should think I desired an audience . . . the extraordinary pompous touchiness of men . . . . why didn't he see I did not dream of suggesting he should come again just to see me. I've forgotten Mr. Bowdoin . . . . and the Museum . . . . everything. . . . I sit here . . . . playing to hide myself from the Baileys and he is away somewhere making



people happy. "They do not care . . . . they see me, they shout Ah ! Don *Clement* ! I amuse them, I laugh, they think I am happy. Voilà tout, mademoiselle. : . . . . " Il n'y a qu'une chose qui m'amuse."

## CHAPTER VIII

A DAY of blazing heat changed the season suddenly. Flat threatening sunlight travelled round the house. The shadowy sun-blinded flower-scented waiting-room held street-baked patients in its deep armchairs. Some of them were languid. But none of them suffered. They kept their freshness and freedom from exhaustion by living away from toil and grimy heat ; in cool clothes, moving swiftly through moving air in carriages and holland-blinded hansoms ; having ices in expensive shade ; being waited on in the cool depths of west-end houses ; their lives disturbed only by occasional dentistry. The lean dark patients were like lizards, lively and darting and active even in the sweltering heat.

Miriam's sunless room was cool all day. Through her grey window she could see the sunlight pouring over the jutting windows of Mr. Leyton's

small room and reflected in the grimy sheen of the frosted windows of the den. Her day's work was unreal, as easy a dream. All about her were open sunlit days that her summer could not bring, and that yet were hers as she moved amongst them; a leaf dropped in the hall, the sight of a summer dress, summer light coming through wide open windows took her out into them. Summer would never come again in the old way, but it set her free from cold, and let her move about unhampered in the summers of the past. Summer was happiness. . . . Individual things were straws on the stream of summer happiness.

At tea time in the den there was a darkening hush. It was like a guest, turning everyone's attention to itself, abolishing differences, setting free unexpected sympathies. Everyone spoke of the coming storm and looked beautiful in speaking. The day's work was discussed as if in the presence of an unseen guest.

She set out from the house of friends to meet the darkened daylight . . . . . perhaps the sudden tapping of thunder-drops upon her thin

blouse. The street was a livid grey, brilliant with hidden sunlight.

The present can be judged by the part of the past it brings up. If the present brings up the happiness of the past, the present is happy.

Purgatory. The waters of Lethe and Eunoe 'forgetfulness and sweet memory'; and then Heaven. The Catholics are right about expiation. If you are happy in the present something is being expiated. If life contains moments of paradise you must be in purgatory looking across the vale of Asphodel. You can't be in hell. . . . Yet hell would not be hell without a knowledge of heaven. If once you've been in heaven you can never escape. Yet Dante believed in everlasting punishment.

Bathing in the waters of Lethe and Eunoe unworthily is drinking one's own damnation. But happiness crops up before one can prevent it. Perhaps happiness is one long sin, piling up a bill. . . . . It is my secret companion. Waiting at

the end of every dark passage. I did not make myself. I *can't* help it.

Brilliant . . . . *brilliant* ; and someone was seeing it. There was no thunderstorm, no clouds or pink edges on the brilliant copper grey. She wandered on down the road hemmed by flaring green. The invisible sun was everywhere. There was no air, nothing to hold her body separate from the scene. The grey brilliance of the sky was upon the pavement and in the green of the park, making mauve shadows between the trees and a mist of mauve amongst the further green. The high housefronts stood out against the grey, eastern-white, frilled below with new-made green, sprouting motionlessly as you looked . . . . . white plaster houses against the blue of the Mediterranean, grey mimosa trees, green-feathered lilac of wisteria. Between the houses and the park the road glared wooden grey, dark, baked, grey, edged with the shadowless stone grey of the pavement. Summer. Eternity *showing*. . . . .

The Euston Road was a narrow hot channel of noise and unbreathable odours, the dusty ex-

hausting cruelty of the London summer, leading on to the feathery green floored woods of Endsleigh Gardens edged by grey house fronts, and ending in the cool stone of St. Pancras Church.

In the twilit dining-room one's body was like a hot sun throbbing in cool dark air, ringed by cool walls holding darkness in far corners ; coolness poured out through the wide open windows towards the rain-cool grey facades of the opposite houses, cool and cool until the throbbing ceased.

All the forms seated round the table were beautiful ; far-away and secret and separate, each oneself set in the coming of summer, unconscious. One soul. Summer is the soul of man. Through all the past months they had been the waiting guests of summer.

The pain of trying to get back into the moment of the first vision of spring, the perfect moment before the thought came that spring was going on in the country unseen, was over. The moment came back of itself . . . . the green flush in the

squares, the ripples of emerald fringed pink geraniums along the balconies of white houses.

After dinner Miriam left the dining-room, driven joyfully forth, remaining behind, floating and drifting happily about, united with everyone in the room as her feet carried her step by step without destination, going everywhere, up through the staircase twilight. . . .

The drawing-room was filled with saffron light, filtering in through the curtains hanging motionless before the high French windows. Within the air of the room, just inside the faint smell of dusty upholstery was the peace of the new found summer. Mrs. Bailey's gift. There had been no peace of summer last year in her stifling garret. This year the summer was with her, in the house where she was. Far away within the peace of the room was the evening of a hot summer day at Waldstrasse, the girls sitting about, beautiful featureless forms together forever in the blissful twilight of the cool saal and sitting in its little summer house *Ulrica*, everybody, her dark delicate profile lifted towards the garden, her unconscious pearly beauty grouped against the

undisturbing presence of Fraulein Pfaff. Miriam turned to the near window and peered through the thick mesh of the smoke-yellowed lace curtain. Behind it the french window stood ajar. Drawing aside the thick dust-smelling lace she stepped out and drew the door to behind her. There were shabby drawing-room chairs standing in an irregular row on the dirty grey stone, railed by a balustrade of dark maroon painted iron railings almost colourless with black grime. But the elastic outer air was there and away at the end of the street a great gold pink glow stood above and showed through the feathery upper branches of the trees in Endsleigh Gardens. A number of people must have been sitting out before dinner. That was part of their dinner-time happiness. Presently some of them would come back. She scanned the disposition of the chairs. The little comfortable circular velvet chair stood in the middle of the row, conversationally facing the high-backed wicker chair. The other chairs were the small stiff velvet-seated ones. The one at the north end of the balcony could be turned towards the glowing sky with its back to the rest of the balcony. She reached and turned it and sat down. The opposite houses



with their balconies on which groups were already forming stood sideways, lost beyond the rim of her glasses. The balcony of the next house was empty ; there was nothing between her and the vista of green feathering up into the intense gold-rose glow. . . . She could come here every night . . . filling her life with green peace ; preparing for the stifling heat of the nights in her garret. This year, with dinner in the cool dining-room and the balcony for the evening, the summer would not be so unbearable. She sat still, lifted out into garden freshness. . . . Benediction. . . . People were stepping out on to the balcony behind her, remarking on the beauty of the evening, their voices new and small in the outer air. . . . If she never came out again this summer would be different. It had begun differently. She knew what lay ahead and could be prepared for it.

She would find coolness at the heart of the swelter of London if she could keep a tranquil mind. The coolness at the heart of the central swelter was wonderful life, from moment to moment, pure *life*. To go forward now, from this moment, alive, keeping alive, through the

London summer. Even to go away for holidays would be to break up the wonder, to snap the secret clue and lose the secret life. . . .

The rosy gold was deepening and spreading.

Miriam found herself rested as if by sleep. It seemed as if she had been sitting in the stillness for a time that was longer than the whole of the working day. To recover like this every day . . . to have at the end of every day a cool *solid* clear head and rested limbs and the feeling that the strain of work was so far away that it could never return. The tireless sense of morning and new day that came in moving from part to part of her London evenings, and strongest of all at the end of a long evening, going on from a lecture or a theatre to endless leisure, reading, the happy gaslight over her book under the sloping roof, always left her in the morning unwilling to get up, and made the beginning of the day horrible with languor and breakfast a scramble, taken to the accompaniment of guilty listening for the striking of nine o'clock from St. Pancras church, and the angry sense of Mr. Hancock already arriving cool

and grey clad at the morning door of Wimpole Street. To-night, going strong and steady to her hot room, sleep would be silvery cool. She would wake early and fresh, and surprise them all at Wimpole Street arriving early and serene after a leisurely breakfast.

The rosy light shone into far-away scenes with distant friends. They came into her mind rapidly one by one, and stayed grouped in a radiance, sharper and clearer than in experience. She recalled scenes that had left a sting, something still to be answered. She saw where she had failed; her friends saw what she had meant, in some secret unconscious part of them that was turned away from the world; in their thoughts with themselves when they were alone. Her own judgments, sharply poised in memory upon the end of some small incident, reversed themselves, dropped meaningless, returned reinforced, went forward, towards some clearer understanding. Her friends drifted forward, coming too near, as if in competition for some central place. To every claim, she offered her evening sky as a full answer. The many forms remained, grouped, like an audience, confronted by the evening.

The gold was fading, a soft mistiness spreading through the deepening rose, making the leafage darker and more opaque. Presently the sky would be mother-of-pearl above a soft dark mass and then pure evening grey outlining the dark feathery tree tops of a London square turning to green below in the lamplight, sinking to sleep, deeply breathing out its freshness to meet the freshness pouring through the streets from the neighbouring squares. Freshness would steal over the outside walls of the houses already cool within. Only in the garrets would the sultry day remain under the slowly cooling roofs.

There was still a pale light flowing into the dusk of the garret. It must be only about nine o'clock. . . . . the gas flared out making a winter brilliance . . . . Four sermons on Dante. . . . Kuenen's Life of Dante . . . . Gemma Donati, *Gemma*, busily making puddings in the world lit by the light of the Mystic Rose; swept away by the rush of words . . . . a stout Italian woman . . . . *Gemma*; Bayatrichay . . . . they were bound to reach music . . . . a silent Italian woman in a hot kitchen scolding, left out of the mystic rose . . . . Lourdes . . . Le Na-

bab . . . atroce comédie de bonheur conjugale sans relâche . . . . the Frenchman *expressing* what the Englishman only thinks . . . “the wife” . . . . . I met my WIFE ! . . . . . red nose and check trousers, smoky self-indulgent married man, all the self-indulgent married men in the audience guffawing . . . . “You must be ready to face being taken for granted, you must hide your troubles, learn to say nothing of your unnoticed exhausting toil, wear a smile above the heart that you believe is breaking ; stand steady in face of the shipwreck of all your dreams. Remember that although he does not know it, in spite of all his apparent oblivion and neglect, if you *fail*, his universe *crumbles*” . . . . . men live their childish ignorant lives on a foundation of pain and exhaustion. Down in the fevered life of pain and exhaustion there is a deep certainty. There is no deep certainty in the lives of men. If there were they would not be forever talking with conceited guilty lips as if something were waiting if they stopped, to spring on them from behind. . . . The evolution of the Idea of God. . . . . I have forgotten what that is about . . . . . a picture of a sort of madonna . . . . . *corn* goddess, with a child and sheaves of corn.

. . . The Mechanism of Thought. . . Thirty Sane Criticisms. . . Critique de la Pensée Moderne ; traduit par H. Navray, Mercure de France. . . . How did he begin ? Where was he when he came out and began saying everybody was wrong ? How did he get to know about it all ? She took down a volume unwillingly . . . . there was something being lost, something waiting within the quiet air of the room that would be gone if she read. It was not too late. Why did men write books ? Modern men ? The book was open. Her eyes scanned unwillingly. Fabric. How did he find his words. No one had ever said *fabric* about anything. It made the page alive . . . . a woven carpet, on one side a beautiful glowing pattern, on the other dull stringy harshness . . . . there is a dangerous *looseness* . . . . her heart began beating apprehensively. The room was dead about her. She sat down tense, and read the sentence through. There is a dangerous looseness in the fabric of our minds. She imagined the words spoken, looseness was ugly, making the mouth ugly in speech. There is a looseness in the fabric of our minds. That is what he would have said in conversation, looking nowhere and waiting to floor an objection. There

is a dangerous, he had written. That introduced another idea. You were not supposed to notice that there were two statements, but to read smoothly on, accepting. It was deliberate. Put in deliberately to frighten you into reading more. Dangerous. The adjective in the sentence, personal, a matter of opinion. People who read the books do not think about *adjectives*. They like them. Conversation is *adjectives*! . . . . all the worry of conversation is because people use adjectives and rush on. . . . But you can't describe . . . but dangerous is not a descriptive adjective . . . there is a twisted looseness, that describes . . . that is Saxon . . . Abendmahl . . . dangerous, French . . . the Prince of Wales uses the elegant Norman idiom . . . dangerous is an idea, the language of ideas. It expresses nothing but an opinion about life . . . a threat daring you to disagree. Dangerous to what? . . . . Man is a badly made machine . . . an oculist could improve upon the human eye . . . and the mind wrong in some way too . . . logic is a cheap arithmetic. *Imagination*. What is imagination? Is it his imagination that has found out that mind is loose? Is not imagination mind? It is his

imaginative mind. A special kind of mind. But if mind discovers that mind is unreliable, its conclusion is also unreliable. That's logic . . . . .

Barbara. All Mind is unreliable. Man is mind, therefore man is unreliable. . . . . Then it is useless to try and know anything . . . . . books go on . . . . . he has invented imagination. Images. Fabric. But he did not invent dangerous That is cheek. By this sin fell the angels. Perhaps he is a fallen angel. I was right when I told Eve I had sold my soul to the devil. . . . .

"Quite a good afterglow" and then wheeling alertly about to capture and restate some thread . . . . . and then later, finding you still looking.

"M'yes; a fine . . . . . fuliginous . . . . . *pink*. . . . . God's had a strawberry ice for supper" . . . . . endless inexhaustible objections . . . . . a cold grim scientific world . . . . . Alma knew it. In that clear bright house with the satisfying furniture . . . . . now let's all make Buddhas. Let's see who can make the best Buddha. . . . . Away from them you could forget; but it was going on all the time . . . . . somehow ahead of everything else that was going on. . . . . She got up and replaced the book It was on her shelf; a signed copy; extraordinary. It was an



extraordinary privilege. No one else could write books like that ; no one else knew so much about everything. Right or wrong it was impossible to give up hearing all he had to say . . . . and they were kind, alive to one's life in a way other people were not. . . . .

She strolled to the window, finding renewal in the familiar creaking of her floor in the house, here. . . . She went back across the happy creaking and turned out the gas and came again to the window. The sky was dark enough to show a brilliant star ; here and there in the darkness of the opposite house fronts was an oblong of golden light. The faint blue light coming up from the street lit up the outer edges of the grey stone window-sills. The air under the wooden roof of the window space was almost as close as it was under the immense height of upper coolness. . . . Down at the end of the road were the lamplit green trees ; plane-tree shadows on the narrow pavement. She put on her hat in the dark.

Crossing the roadway to reach the narrow strip of pavement running along under the trees she saw single dark figures standing at intervals

against the brilliant lamplit green and swerved back to the wide pavement. She had forgotten they would be there. They stood like sentinels. . . . Behind them the lamplit green flared feverishly. . . . In the shadow of St. Pancras church there were others, small and black in a desert . . . lost quickly in the great shadow where the passers-by moved swiftly through from light to light. Out in the Euston Road along the pavements shadowed by trees and left in darkness by the high spindling shaded candles of the lamps along the centre of the roadway, they came walking, a foreign walk, steadily slow and wavy and expressive, here and there amongst the shapeless expressionless forms of the London wayfarers. The high stone entrance of Euston Station shone white across the way. Anyone can go into a station. Within the entrance gravelled darkness opened out on either side. Silence all round and ahead where silent buildings had here and there a lit window. Where was the station? Immense London darkness and stillness alone and deserted like a country place at night, just beyond the noises of the Euston Road. A murder might happen here. The cry of an engine sounded, muffled and far away. Just ahead in

the centre of the approaching wide mass of building was a wide dimly lit stone archway. The rattle of a hansom sounded from an open space beyond. Its light appeared swaying swiftly forward and lit the archway. The hansom bowled through in startling silence, nothing but the jingle and dumb leathery rattle of the harness, and passed, the plonking of the horse's hoofs and the swift slur of the wheels sounding out again in the open space. The archway had little side pathways for passengers roofed by small arching extensions of the central arch . . . . *indiarubber* . . . . pavement to muffle . . . . the building was hotel ; Edwards daylight Family Hotel . . . . expensive people lodging just above the arch, travelling, coming to London, going away from London, with no thought of the dark secret neighbourhood. A courtyard opened out beyond the arch. It was not even yet the station. There was a road just ahead going right and left, with lamps ; just in front to the left across the road a lit building with a frosted lower window and a clock . . . . a post office. Miriam went through the swing door into warm yellow gaslight. At the long counter people stood busily occupied or waiting their turn, with their backs to the

dusty floor space, not noticing the grey space of dusty floor and the curious warm gleam of the light falling upon it from behind the iron grille along the counter. The clerks were fresh and serene and unhurried, making a steady quiet workaday feeling; late at night. It swung the day round, morning and evening together in the gaslit enclosure. She stood at the counter sharing the sense of affairs. She could be a customer for a penny stamp. Waiting outside was the walk back through the various darkness, the india-rubber pathway . . . . knowing her way.

She let herself into the hall with an air of returning from a hurried necessary errand. Beyond the mysterious Bailey curtains partly screening the passage to the front door she saw Dr. Hurd standing at the dining-room door; good night he laughed back into the room and turned, meeting her as she emerged into the light. He paused smiling. Here's Miss Henderson he said into the room. Miriam was passing the door. Aren't you coming in he urged smiling. Ho, I've just been to the post office said Miriam passing into the room. Ho, isn't it a perfect evening she announced taking in Dr. Waynelete standing

tall with small bent pale face at the end of the table and the other two rising from their places by the fireside. Dr. Hurd closed the door and came and flopped down in the easy chair in front of the piano. I know you won't sit here Miss Henderson. No Miss Henderson doesn't care for cushions murmured Dr. von Heber at her side. Take this chair he pursued and sat near as she sat down in a little stiff chair facing the fireplace, Dr. Winchester subsiding a little behind her on the other side.

It's a purfect evening murmured Dr. Wayne-flete. Miriam turned and searched his white bent face. She had never seen him speaking in a room. The thought behind the white slightly bulging forehead was his own, Wayne-flete, brilliant, keeping him apart ; the little narrowing peak of livid white face, the green shadows about the small pale mouthing lips, the fact of his heart-disease and his Irish parentage were things that dared to approach and attach themselves to him ; that people knew.

A purfect evening he repeated plucking gently at the threads of the table cloth. He would never originate a remark or ask a question except of patients or an engineer standing near some

difficult machinery. He knew everything by just being about. He was head and shoulders above the other three. Delicate, of gentle blood and narrow fragile body ; a strong spirit ; impossible of approach by speech ; everything she said would carry her away from him ; perhaps he was already planning his escape. One day he would suddenly fall down, dead ; young and unknown to anyone in the world, carrying away his mystery.

"Eleven o'clock." She had shattered the silence he had built.

"You don't call that late" said Dr. von Heber released and rushing to rescue her. He sat bland and square and simple beneath the coming long procession of years and days ; but his firmly dimpled swift Canadian smile, brilliant with the flash of the flawless perfect arch of his strong even teeth brought past and future into the moment, giving them to the sudden charm of this meeting, referring back to that first evening by the table.

"Oh no ; its frightfully early."

"That's a most delightful hyperbole."

"I shall summons you for calling me an isosceles triangle."

Dr. Waynelete laughed too . . . . a small

sound drowned by Dr. Hurd's thwack on the arm of his chair as he flung back his head for his laugh.

"It *has* been wonderful to-day, don't you *think*? Did you see the extraordinary light this afternoon?"

"Well no; we were all of us immured, but we were out this evening; we thought it the best specimen of London weather we'd struck so far."

"There's nothing whatever the matter with London weather. It's *perfect*; the most perfect in the world." Dr. Hurd resumed his shakings of laughter, restrained to listen. Dr. Winchester was sitting bent forward smiling dreamily.

"I know you won't like me to call that a hyperbole, but you won't quite expect me to say I unreservedly agree."

"It isn't a question of agreement or disagreement. It's a simple fact." Dr. Hurd again struck his chair and sat forward feeling for a handkerchief in a side pocket, his face a tearful grin turned upon Dr. von Heber.

"You are a loyal champion."

"English weather does not want a champion. It's so wonderful. Perhaps you are thinking of

Italian skies and that sort of thing ; in countries where the weather does not change or not suddenly ; only at fixed seasons. That's very nice in a way. You can make plans. But I know I should long for grey days and changes in the sky. A grey day is not melancholy ; its exciting. You can see everything. The sun makes everything pale and blinds you."

"There I think you mistaken. Nothing beautifies like sunlight, and if you've the sun behind you, you get the ahead prospect without being blinded."

"I know what you mean ; but I want both ; for contrast perhaps ; no, that's silly ; the grey days for their own sake, the misty atmosphere. Fog. I think a real London fog is perfection ; everything and the shapes and outlines of things looming up only as you pass them. Wonderful."

"Well, there you leave us behind. I can't see anything either beautiful or in the least wonderful in your town fogs."

"Quite so. A taste for town fog is an artificial taste. Town fog's not a natural phenomenon. It's just, town dirt."

"I don't care how it begins. It's perfect. It makes the whole day and adventure even if you're



indoors. It's perfect to have the light on and nothing to be seen outside but a copper glare. Outside is a glorious adventure in a new unknown world. . . . In a way all our weathers are that. In a way the weather's enough, in itself, without anything else."

"That seems to me a remarkable, a very extra-ordinary point of view. You can't in any circumstances make it a general defence of your climate. It's a purely personal notion."

"It isn't. Even people who say they don't like fogs are different ; interested in the effect while it is on."

"Uneasy, no doubt, like animals in a trap."

"I refer to Miss Henderson's extra-ordinary valuation of weather as enough in itself. I consider that is one of *the* most *extra-ordinary* points of view I ever heard stated."

"No one can deny the quahl-ty of interest to the vagaries of your western European climut ; from our point of view its all interest and no climut ; ye can't tell from day to day what season ye'll be in and they all seem — stormy."

"The seasons crop up all the year round, sometimes three in one day. That's just the fascinating thing."

“ Quite so, we find that varry disturbing.”

“ Our sudden changes of temperature keep us hardy.”

“ That’s true ; you’re a hardy people. Your weather suits you, beyond a doubt.”

“ In *Ireland*, the weather changes every few minutes.”

“ Hah, Wayneffete.”

“ Granted. No doubt that assisted my parents to decide to leave ; I don’t wonder at it.”

“ You’re temperate. You’ve got the sea at a stone’s throw all round. You don’t have notable extremes. But there’s our trouble. Your extremes when they come ain’t arranged for. There’s no heat like your English heat, and my word your English houses in the winter’d take some beating.”

“ You mean boarding-houses.”

“ Not entirely. Though I admit your English hoames are unique in the matter of comfort. There’s nothing in the world like a real good *English hoame*. And not only in the matter of comfort.”

“ Yes but look here von Heber. I know your fine English parlours with fine great fires to sit around, what they call ‘ cosy ’ over here, but my

life why don't they warm their corridors and sleeping rooms ? ”

“ We don't *because* it's unhealthy. A cold bedroom keeps you hardy and you *sleep* better.”

“ And not only warm them but light them. My word when they take you out of their warm parlours into cold corridors and land you in an ice-house with a little bit of a flickering candle.”

“ You're not tempted to read in bed and you go to sleep in healthy bracing air ; it keeps you *hardy*.”

“ Do you never read after you retire ? ”

“ I do ; and have the gas and a lamp to keep warm. I like warm rooms and I think in many ways it must be lovely to be able to wear muslin dresses indoors in snowy weather and put on a fur coat to go out ; but I should be sorry to see the American warm house idea introduced into England.”

“ You're willing to be inconsistent then.”

“ Consistency is the something of something minds.”

“ I guess our central-heated residences would appeal to you.”

“ I know they would. But I should freeze

in the winter ; because I shouldn't be able to wear a fur coat."

"How so ?"

"I'm an anti-vivisectionist."

"Then you'd best stay where they're not needed. Your winters don't call for them. It's the funniest thing in *life* the way your wimmun go around in furs."

"Furs are frightfully becoming ; like lace and violets."

"Then you exonerate them although you're against the slaying evidently, as well as the use of beasts for experiment."

"They don't think."

"My word that's true ; but all the thinking in creation won't keep an Esquimau warm without furs."

"There's no need for anyone to live up there. The Hudson's Bay Commissioners are trades-people."

"That's a big proposition."

"Well ?"

"You'd advocate everyone living in temperate climes to spare the beasts ?"

"There's no reason except trade for anyone to live in snow."

"There's a mighty except."

"Well?"

"What about phthisical subjects who need dry cold climes?"

"Wool and astrakhan."

"Well I guess furs'll be worn for a bit yet."

"That doesn't affect the question."

"I gather you reckon the beasts oughtn't help advance science."

"They don't. Doctors are as ill as anybody."

"True enough. You consider that invalidates medical science?"

"Of course they are over-worked and many of them splendid. But illness doesn't decrease. If one disease goes down another goes up."

"Great *Cæsar*, where did you come across that?"

"Even so; but suppose they *all* went up?"

"Besides, you talk about animals advancing science. Even if there wasn't that great French physiologist or chemist or something who looked at the result of experiments on animals and said *hélas, nous avons les mains vides*. He declared that there's nothing to be learned about *human* bodies from animals and even if there were the

thing is that the animals have no choice. We've no right to force them to suffer."

"An animal's constituted differently to a man. You can't compare them in the matter of sensitiveness to pain."

"I knew you'd say that. If people really want to advance science by experiments on bodies they should offer their own bodies."

"Someone's been working on your mind if you believe animals suffer more than men."

"I'd rather see a woman suffer than a man and a man rather than a child and a child rather than an animal. Animals are bewildered and don't understand. They have nothing to help them. They don't understand their sufferings."

"You rate men lower than women in power to endure pain."

"They get more practice."

"You're right there."

"They're less sensitive."

"That's debateable, Waynelete."

"Women appear to be callous over the sufferings of other women and to make a fuss over men. It's because sick men are more helpless and pitiful. Women *appear* to be. But the sun *appears* to go round the earth."

"I doubt if ever there'll come a time when we'll have live humanity in our experimental laboratories."

"Science has got to go ahead anyway."

"But if it goes ahead by forcing; sensitive creatures; with . . . . sensitive nervous systems, to bear fear and pain . . . . we shall lose more morally than we shall gain scientifically even if we gain scientifically and we don't because nearly everyone is *ill*."

"You consider knahludg can be bought at too high a price."

"Well; look at the continental luminaries; where there are no restrictions; they don't even care about their patients, only diseases interest them, and in general, not only in science, they don't really know anything, the Germans and the French, you have only to look at them. They are brutal."

"That's a large statement. If you'll pardon me I should say there's a certain amount of insular prejudice in that."

"I have not a scrap of insular prejudice. I like foreigners. They are more intelligent than Englishmen. But there's something they don't know that makes them all alike. I once heard a

wealthy old Jew say that he'd go to Germany for diagnosis and to England for treatment, and he'd had operations and illnesses all over the world. That expresses it."

"You infer that the English have more humanity."

"They don't regard the patient as a case in the way continentals do."

"Well I guess when we're sick we all like to go home."

"You mean the Jew had no home. But he chose the English to go home to when he was ill."

"That's true in more senses than one. This country's been a home for the Jews right away back."

"It's a great country. That's sure."

"Science has got to go away ahead. If you're going to be humanitarians over here you must leave continental science out of your scheme. So long as you carry out their results you can't honestly cry down their methods."

"You must cry down their methods if you don't approve of them."

"You can't put back. You can't prevent association between the different lands ; especially in matters of science."



“What *I'm* saying. You've got to accept the goods, even supposing your particular constitution of mind inclines you to bulleave them ill-gotten.”

“It's a case of good coming out of evil.”

“That's Jesuitical, the end justifying the means. I don't believe that. Why should science go ahead so fast? Where's the hurry as you say in Canada?”

“Well, you've only to look around to see that.”

“I *don't* see it. Do you mean that people who make scientific experiments do it because they want to improve the world. They don't. It's their curiosity.”

“Divine curiosity I've heard it called.”

“The divine curiosity of Eve . . . . that's the answer to the Mosaic fable about woman. She was interested in the serpent, and polite to him and gossiped with him. Science is scandal-mongering; gossip about the universe. Men talk about women gossiping. My word.”

“Stars. I d like some of our chaps to hear you say that.”

“It is. Darwin gossiped about monkeys and in his old age he looked exactly like one and regretted that he had neglected music.”

"You can't have it both ways. Each man must pursue one line or another."

"Poor dears yes."

"You're inclined to pity us all."

"That's English humanitarianism may be."

"I'm not a humanitarian. I can't bear humanity, in the mass. I think it's a frightful idea."

"A fairly solid idea."

"I prefer . . . the equator, and the moon, and the plane of the ecliptic; I think the plane of the ecliptic is a perfectly lovely thing."

"It's a scientific discovery."

"Yes but not on the body of an animal."

"The body of the chap who began all that had some pretty hard sufferings."

"Do you know the schoolboy's definition of the equator?"

"No, but I guess it's a good one."

"A menagerie lion running round the world once in every twenty-four hours. I think it's an absolutely perfect idea."

"I guess that's good enough to stop on."

"You off Winchester?"

In the breaking of the group Dr. von Heber came near with his smile. Dr. Hurd was noisily

stretching himself, laughing and coughing. No one was listening. They were quite alone among their friends, his friends, Canada. This has been a charming ending to a very lovely day he said quietly. Miriam beamed and was silent. Did you see the afterglow she asked humbly. His smile reappeared. He took in what she said, but beamed because they were talking. She tried to beat back her words, but they were on her lips and she was already moving away when she spoke. "A fine . . . . fuliginous . . . . *pink* wasn't it?"

## 2

"Where is the *harm* child, in your sitting up at a piano, even behind a curtain; in a large room in Gower Street, I can't imagine why you say *GOWER* Street; playing, with the soft pedal either down or *up*, the kind of music that you play so beautifully? Can you see her difficulty Jan?"

"Not even with the most powerful of microscopes."

Lolling on the windowsill of their lives to glance at a passing show. . . . . The blessed

damosel looked out. Leaning, heavy on the golden balcony. *She* knew why not. Heavy blossoming weight, weighed down with her heavy hair, the sky blossoming in it, facing, just able to face without sinking, the rose-gold world, blossoming under her eyes.

Thin hard fingers of women chattering and tweaking. . . . They go up sideways, witches on broomsticks, and chatter angrily in the distance. They cannot stop the sound of the silent crimson blossoming roses.

"I don't approve of séances."

"Have you ever been to one?"

"No ; but I know I don't. It was something about the woman when she asked me."

"That is a personal prejudice."

"It is not a prejudice ; how can it be pre after I have seen her ? "

"Séances are wrong ; because you have taken a dislike to Madame Devine."

"It can't be right to make half a guinea an hour so easily. And she said a guinea for occasional public performances." That's all ; they know now. I had made up my mind. I wanted them to *see* me tempted and refusing for conscience sake.

“ Good Lord ; you’d be a millionaire in no time ; why not take it until you are a millionaire and then if you don’t like it, chuck it ? ”

“ I should like it all right, my part.”

“ Well surely that is all that concerns you. You have nothing whatever to do with what goes on on the other side of the curtain. I think if you would like the job you are a fool to hesitate, don’t you Jan ? ”

“ A fool there was and he made his prayer, yes - I think it is foolish to refuse such an admirable offer.”

“ A rag and a bone and a hank of hair ; that just describes Madame Devine.” That’s not true ; smooth fat thinness with dark filmy cruel clothes that last ; having supper afterwards ; but it would be true in a magazine ; a weird medium ; the grocer’s wife with second sight was fat and ordinary ; a simple woman. Peter, the rough fisherman.

“ Now you are being unchristian.”

“ I’m not. I love the rag and bone and hank of hair type. Sallow. Like Mrs. Pat. . . . . The *ingénue*. Sitting in a corner dressed in white, reading a book. A fat pink face. You can imagine her at forty.”

"Now you are being both morbid and improper."

"I'm not morbid. Am I, Jan?"

"No I do not call you morbid. I call Gracie Harter-Jones morbid."

"Who is she?"

"We met her at Mrs. Mackinley's. She says she is perfectly miserable unless she is in a morbid state. She's written a book called 'The Purple Shawl of Ceremony.'"

"She must be awfully clever."

"She's mad. She revels in being mad. Like 'the Sun shivered. Earth from its darkest basements rocked and quivered.'"

"Oh go I said and see the swans harping upon the rooftops in the corn. Where is the grey felt hat I saw go down, wrinkled and old to meet the lily-leaf, where where my child the little stick that crushed the wild infernal apple of the pit where where the pearl. Snarling he cried I will not have you bless the tropics sitting in a sulky row nor fling your banners o'er the stately wave; I heard shrill minstrelsies . . . . . that's all awfully bad; but you can go on forever."

"I couldn't. I don't know how you do it. I

think its awfully clever. Jan and I roared over your Madeleine Francis Barry letter."

"You can go on for days."

"Barry-paroding."

"You must not wait, nor think of words. If you are in the mood they come more quickly than you could speak or even think; you follow them and the whole effect entertains you. There's something in it. You never know what is coming and you swing about, as long as you keep the rhythm, all over the world. It refreshes you. Sometimes there are the most beautiful things. And you see all the things so vividly."

"She's not morbid; she's mad."

"I'm neither morbid nor mad. It's a splendid way of amusing yourself; better than imagining the chairs in front of you at a concert quietly collapsing." They were scarcely listening. Both of them were depending on each other to listen and answer.

"Do you still go to Ruscino's every night Miriam?"

"With the Spaniard? How is the Spaniard?"

"He's eaten up with dizizz."

"With *what*?"

"That's what Miss Scott says."

"How does she know?"

"All the doctors are prescribing for him."

"Did they tell her?"

"I don't know. She just said it suddenly. Like she says things. The doctors are all awfully fond of him."

"Why are they fond of him?"

"He is extraordinary. He has given up his poster work and does lightning silhouettes, outlines of heads, at five shillings each at some gardens somewhere. Sometimes he makes five pounds an evening at it."

"So you *don't* go to Ruscino's every evening?"

"He had a few weeks of being awfully poor. One day he had only eightpence in the world. Of course he was having all his meals at Tansley Street. But that evening he found out that I had nothing at all. I had been telling him about my meal arrangements. I always pay Mrs. Bailey at the time for my shilling dinners and when I can't afford them I get a fourpenny meal at a Y.W.C.A. He made me take his eightpence. The next day he *walked* I found afterwards, all the way to South Kensington in the grilling heat to see a man about the silhouettes."

"What a little brick."



“He is like that to everybody. And always so. . . .”

“So what?”

“Oh, I can’t express him. But he’s a Jew, you know, a Spanish Jew. Isn’t it extraordinary?”

“Well really Miriam I can’t see that there is anything extraordinary about a man’s being a Spanish Jew if he wants to?”

“I was most awfully surprised. Mrs. Bailey told me. There is some Jewish girl he has been meeting in Kensington; he drew her portrait, a special one, for her father, for five guineas, and he has engaged himself to her because he thought she had money and now finds she has not damn her, he said damn her to Mrs. Bailey, and that he has been boring himself for nothing. He is going into hospital for his gastric ulcer when the season is over and then going to disappear. He told me he never spoke to a woman more than twice; but that he is willing to marry any woman with enough money.”

“Wise man.”

“He has spoken more than twice to you.”

“Yes but I know what he means. Besides we don’t talk, in the society way.”

"How *do* you talk?"

"Oh, I don't know. I air my theories sometimes. He always disagrees. Once he told me suddenly it was very bad for me to go about with him."

"But you go."

"Of course I do." The untold scenes were standing in the way. There was no way of telling them. . . . Tansley Street life was more and more unreal to them the deeper it grew. It was unreal to them because things were kept back. They were still interested in stories of Wimpole Street, but even there now they only glanced in passing, their thoughts busy in the shared life they perpetually jested over. They listened with reservations; not always believing; sitting in dressing-gowns believing or not as they chose; because one knew one had lost touch and tried to make things interesting to get back into the old glow. . . .

"How did the dinner-party go off?"

"Beautifully."

"Did you talk German?"

"There was no need; the man talked better English than anybody."

"Why did it go off beautifully? Tell us about the beautiful things."

The strange silent twilight, the reassuring shyness of all the guests ; no attempt to talk about anything in particular ; cool hard face and upright coldly jewelled body ; the sense of success with each simple remark. The evening of music. Life-marked people ; their marks showing without pain, covered, half-healed by the hours of kindness.

“ It’s something in the Orlys.”

“ What do you think it is ? ”

“ It’s something frightfully beautiful.”

“ They are very nice people.”

“ That doesn’t mean anything at all.”

“ The secret of beauty is colour and texture. The ointment will preserve the colour and the the texture of your skin—in any climate. Read her the piece about the movement of the hands over a tea-tray. . . . . In pouring out tea never allow the hands to fall slack, or below the level of the tray. Keep them well in view, moving deftly among the articles on the tray ; sitting well back on the seat of the chair the body upright and a little inclined forward from the hips—see Chap. : III. “ How to Sit ”—so that the movements of the wrist and hands are in easy harmony with the whole body. Restrain

the hands. Do not let the fingers splay out. Do not cramp them or allow any effort to appear in the movement of any part of the hand."

"Good heavens. Can't you *see* those women. But that must be by an American."

"Why an American?"

"Oh. I don't know. You can tell. Are you going to try all these things?"

"Rather. We're going in heavily for beauty culture."

"We are going to skip, and have Turkish baths, and steam our faces."

"I suppose one ought."

"I think so. I don't see why one should look old before one's time. One's life is ageing and ravaging. After a Turkish bath one feels like a new-born babe."

"But it would take all one's time and money."

"Even so. It restores your self-respect to feel perfectly groomed and therefore perfectly self-possessed. It makes the office respect you."

"I know. I hate the grubbiness of snipe-life — sometimes."

"Only sometimes?"

"Well, I forget about it. If I didn't I should go mad of grit and dust."

"We *are* mad of grit and dust. That's why we think it's time to do something."

"H'm."

"You really like the Orlys, don't you?"

"You can't like everybody at once. You have to chose. That's the trouble. If you are liking one set of people very much you get out of touch with the others."

"You have so many sets of people."

"I haven't. I hardly know anybody."

"You have hosts of friends."

"I haven't. In the way you mean. I expect I give you wrong impressions."

"Well I think you've a capacity — Don't you think she has a capacity — von Bohlen?"

"She has some very nice friends and some extraordinary ones."

"Like the Flat."

"How is the Flat?"

"Is she still living on a hard-boiled egg and a bottle of stout?"

"And sending notes?"

"Come round at once my state of mind is awful?"

"She's moved. I forgot to tell you. She came to tell me. She stood on the landing and said she had taken up journalism. Writing articles, for *The Taper*. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Isn't *what* wonderful?"

"Suddenly being able to write articles. She's met some people called occultists and says she has never been so happy in her life." . . . . . Are you going to say anything . . . . why do you not think it wonderful. . . . .

## 3

Miriam flung down Tansley Street telling her news. Her conflict with the June dust and heat of the Euston Road had made her forget it. Back in her own world it leapt at her from every sunlit paving stone; drawing her on almost at a run. There was enough to carry her leaping steps right down through London, to the edge of some unfamiliar part and back again, but her room called her; she would go in and up to it and come out again.

. . . . . *hopeless* impossibility . . . . good *reliable* Budge-Whitlock at fifteen. You won't get a Primus under twenty-five. Those other

makes are not made to last ; giving way inside somewhere where you could not see, suddenly ; in the midst of the traffic ; the man's new bicycle, coming in *two*, in Cheapside . . . . smiling, I've got a message for you from Winthrop ; well that's not strictly true. The fact is he wants to advance the money without your knowing it ; commissioned me to see what I can do. You needn't hesitate ; he's got plenty of spare cash. I'll buy the machine and you'll owe the price to me. Kind - kind Winthrop, talking in the workshop. It's a ph-pity she shouldn't av a ph-ph-machine if she wants one without waiting t-ph save up frit . . . . I say Miss Henderson here's a chance for you ; new machine going half-price. No bunkum. It's Lady Slater's. She's off to India. I'll overhaul it for you. Pay as you like, through her steward. My advice is you close. You won't get a better chance . . . reaping the benefit of Mr. Layton's eternal talk about bicycling . . . . . no trouble ; overhauled and reliable ; coming out of space.

. . . . . Lifted off the earth, sitting at rest in the moving air, the London air turning into fresh moving air flowing through your head, the green squares and high houses moving, sheer-ing smoothly along, sailing towards you changed,

upright and alive, moving by, speaking, telescoping away behind unforgotten, still visible, staying in your forward-looking eyes, being added to in unbroken movement, a whole, moving silently to the sound of firm white tyres circling on smooth wood, echoing through endless future to the riding ring of the little bell, ground easily out by firm new cogs. . . . *Country* roads flowing by in sun and shadow; the ring of the bell making the hedges brilliant at empty turnings . . . . . all there in your mind with dew and freshness as you threaded round and round and in and out of the maze of squares in evening light; consuming the evening time but leaving you careless and strong; even with the bad loose hired machine.

She let herself in and swept into the dining-room taking in while she said eagerly, crossing the room I've bought a machine. A Wolverhampton Humber. With Beeston tyres. B.S.A. fittings. Ball Bearings . . . . the doctors grouped about the mantelpiece. They gathered round her. She was going backwards; through a scene she recognised; in a dream. Dr. von Heber's welcoming smile stood at the end of it. They could not be there idle at that time of day, she



assured herself as she talked. She knew they were there before she came in, without even thinking of them. She sat down in their midst confidently saying the phrases of the scene as they came towards her, backwards unfolding. The doctors went back with her, brothers, supporting and following. Her bicycle led the way. Their bright world had made it for her.

They had seen the English country with her. It was more alive to them. They would remember. Dr. von Heber was taking it in, with his best ruminating smile, as a personal possession ; seeing it with English eyes. Her last year's ride through the counties was shared now. It would go to Canada.

“ It's coming all the way from *Bakewell*.”

“ Where will that place be ? ”

“ Oh I don't know ; somewhere ; in the north I think. Yorkshire. No, the Peak. The Peak district. Peak Freane. They bake splendidly. The further north you get the better they bake.” The scene was swaying forward into newness. Dr Winchester suddenly began talking about the historical interest of the neighbourhood. They had all been down to look at the Old Curiosity

Shop . . . . there was something about it . . . . and there was a better local story of their kind. She told Mr. Leyton's story of the passage in Little Gower Place, body snatchers carrying newly buried bodies through it by night from St. Pancras churchyard to the hospital.

"You don't say so. To think we've gone along there this while and not known."

"That shop in Lincoln's Inn isn't the shop Dickens meant. It's been pulled down. It's only the site. Some people think Dickens is sentimental."

"Those who think so are hyper-critical. Besides being sentimental don't prevent him being one of your very greatest men."

"*You* should appreciate him highly. If ever there was any man revealed abuses. . . . You ought to read our Holmes' Elsie Venner — We call it his medicated novel over at home," smiled Dr. von Heber. He was speaking low, making a separate conversation. The others were talking together.

"Yes," murmured Miriam. "I must." They both smiled a wide agreement. "I've got it over at home" murmured Dr. von Heber his smile deepening forwards. You shall read it

when you come. *We'll* read it, he sat smiling to himself. She tried to stay where he was, not to be distracted by her thoughts. It must be Holmes worst book. A book written on purpose, to prove something.

"Didactic" she said with helpless suddenness, "but I like Holmes breakfast books."

"You've read those?"

"Yes" said Miriam wearily. He had caught something from her thoughts. She saw him looking smaller, confined to the passing English present, a passing moment in his determined Canadian life. His strong unconsidered opinions held him through it and would receive and engulf him forever when he went back. Perhaps he had not noticed her thoughts. Well I must bid you a welcome adoo she said getting up to go.

"Now *where*" he smiled rising, and surrounding her with his smile, "where did you discover Artemus *Ward*?"

## CHAPTER IX

**I**T was Mrs. Bailey coming up the top flight clearing her throat. Tapping at the door.

“ Ah. I thought the young lady was in. I *thought* so.” Mrs. Bailey stood approving inside the door. The sunlight streamed on to her shabby skirt. The large dusty house, the many downstairs rooms, the mysterious dark-roomed vault of the basement, all upright in her upright form ; hurried smeary cleansings, swift straightening of grey-sheeted beds, the strange unfailing water-system, gurgling cisterns, gushing taps and lavatory flushes, the wonder of gaslight and bedroom candles, the daily meals magically appearing and disappearing ; her knowledge of the various mysteriously arriving and vanishing people, all beginning and ending in her triumphant, reassuring smile that went forward outside beyond these things, with everybody.

Now that she was there, bearing and banishing all these heavy things, the squat green tea-pot

on the table in the blaze of window-light, the Chinese lantern hanging from the hook in the ceiling, the little Madras muslin curtains at either end of the endmost lattices made a picture and set the room free from the challenge of the house accumulating as Miriam had come up through it and preventing the effect she had sought when she put out the green teapot on the sunlit table. She was receiving Mrs. Bailey as a guest, backed up by the summery little window-room. She stood back in the gloom, dropping back into the green lamplit stillness of the farmhouse garden. The Song of Hiawatha sounded on and on amongst the trees, the trunk of the huge sheltering oak lit brightly by the shaded lamp on the little garden table, the forms in the long chairs scarcely visible. She offered Mrs. Bailey the joy of her journey down, her bicycle in the van, Miss Szigmondy's London guests, the sixteenth-century ingle, the pine-scented bedrooms with sloping floors, the sandy high-banked lanes and pine-clad hills, the strange talk with the connoisseur, the kind stupid boyish mind of the London doctor who had *seen* myopic astigmatism across the lunch table and admitted being beaten in argument without resentment ; the long dewy

morning ride to Guildford ; the happy thorns in her hands keeping the week-end still going on at Wimpole Street ; her renewed sense of the simplicity of imposing looking people, their personal helplessness on the surface of wealthy social life ; the glow of wealthy social life lighting the little wooden window-room, gleaming from the sheeny flecks of light on the well-shaped green teapot.

Mrs. Bailey advanced to the middle of the floor and stood looking towards the window. My word aren't we *smart* she breathed.

" I like the teapot and the lantern, don't you ? " said Miriam.

" Very pretty, mts, very pretty, young lady."

" It reminds me of week-ends. It *is* a week-end. That is my drawing-room."

" That's it. It's a week-end," beamed Mrs. Bailey. But she had come for something. The effect was not spoiled by giving a wrong, *social* impression of it, because Mrs. Bailey was busily thinking behind her voice. When she had gone the silent effect would be there, more strongly. Perhaps she had some new suggestion to make about Sissie.

" Well, young lady, I want to talk to you." Mrs. Bailey propped one elbow on the mantel-

piece and brushed at her shirt. Miriam waited, watching her impatiently. The Tansley Street life was fading into the glow of the on-coming holiday season. Rain was cooling the July weather, skirmishy sunlit April rain and wind drawing her forward. There was leisure in cool uncrowded streets and restaurants and in the two cool houses, no pressure of work, the gay easy August that was almost as good as a holiday, and the certainty beyond the rain, of September brilliance.

“Well you know I’ve a great regard for youl young lady.”

Miriam stared back at the long row of interviews with Mrs. Bailey and sought her face for her invisible thoughts.

“Well to come straight to the point without beating about the bush, it’s about him, that little man, you know who I mean.”

“Who?”

“Mendizzable.”

Miriam’s interest awoke and flared. That past patch of happy life had been somehow or other visible to Mrs. Bailey. She felt decorated and smiled into the room.

“Well; you know I don’t believe in talk going

about from one to another. In *my* opinion people should mind their own business and not listen to tittle-tattle, or if they do, keep it to themselves without passing it on and making mischief."

"Has someone been trying to make mischief about poor little Mr. Mendizabal?"

"Well, if it was about him I wouldn't mind so much. Little villain. That's my name for him."

"Fascinating little villain if he must be called a villain."

"Well; that's what I've got to ask you my chahld; are you under a fascination about him? You'll excuse me asking such a question."

Solicitude! *what* for?

"Well. I *did* think him fascinating; he fascinated me, he would anybody. He would fascinate Miss *Scott* if he chose."

"'Er? 'Er be fascinated by anybody? She thinks too much of number one for that."

. . . . . Miss *Scott*. Dressing so carefully, so full of independent talk and laughter and not able to be fascinated . . . . . too far-seeing to be fascinated.

"But why do you ask? I'm not responsible for Mr. Mendizabal's being a fascinating little man."



"Fascinating little *devil*. You should have heard Dr. Winchester."

Something hidden; all the time; behind the politeness of the house.

"Dr. *Winchester*?"

"Dr. Winchester. Do you remember him coming out into the hall one evening when you were brushing your coat?"

"And brushing it for me. Yes."

"He didn't know how to let you go." There was a trembling in Mrs. Bailey's voice. "He said," she pursued breathlessly, "he was in two minds to come with you himself."

"*Where? Why?*"

"Why? He *knew* that fella was waiting for you round the corner."

Suddenly appearing, brushing so carefully . . . . . why not have spoken and come.

"Well now we're coming to it. I can't tell you how it all happened, that's between Mr. Gunner and Miss S. They got to know you was going out with Mendizzable and where you went. It's contemptible I know, if you like, but there's many such people about."

Miriam checked her astonishment, making a mental note for future contemplation of the

spectacle of Mr. Gunner, or Miss Scott, following her to Ruscino's. They had told Mrs. Bailey and talked to the doctors. . . . Spies ; talking idle ; maliciously picking over her secret life.

" Dr. Winchester said he was worried half out of his senses about you."

" Why not have said so ? "

" You may be wondering," Mrs. Bailey flushed a girlish pink, " why I come up to-day telling you all this. That's just what *I* say. That's just the worst of it. He never breathed a word to me till he went."

Dr. Winchester *gone* . . . . the others gone . . . . of *course*. Next week would be August. They had all vanished away ; out of the house, back to Canada. Dr. von Heber gone without a word. Perhaps *he* had been worried. They *all* had. That was why they had all been so nice and surrounding. . . . . That was the explanation of everything. . . . . They were brothers. Jealous brothers. The first she had had. This was the sort of thing girls had who had brothers. Check. If only she had known and shown them how silly they were.

" Lawk. I wish to goodness he'd come straight to me at once."

"Well. It's awfully sweet of them from their point of view. They were such *awfully* nice little men in their way." . . . . *Why* didn't they come to me, instead of all this talk? They knew me well enough. All those long talks at night. And all the time they were seeing a foolish girl fascinated by a disreputable foreigner. How dare they?

"That's what I say. I can't forgive him for that. They're all alike. Selfish."

"All old men like Dr. Winchester are selfish. Selfish and weak. They get to think of nothing but their comforts. And keep out of everything by talk."

"It's not him I mean. It's the other one."

"Which?" What was Mrs. Bailey going to say? What? Miriam gazed angrily.

"That's what I must tell you. That's why I asked you if you was under a fascination."

"Oh well, they've gone. What does it matter?"

"I feel I ought to tell you. He, von Heber, had made up his mind to *speak*. He was one in a thousand, Winchester said. She's lost von Heber he said. He thought the *world* of her, 'e sez," gasped Mrs. Bailey. "My *word*, I wish I'd known what was going on."

Miriam flinched. Mrs. Bailey must be made to go now.

"Oh really," she said in trembling tones. "He was an awfully nice man."

"My word. Isn't it a pity," said Mrs. Bailey with tears in her eyes. "It worries me something shocking."

"Oh well, if he was so stupid."

"Well, you can't blame him after what Mendizzable *said*."

"You haven't told me."

"He said he'd only to raise his finger. Oh Lawk. Well there you are, now you've got it all."

Mrs. Bailey *must* go. Mr. Mendizabal's mind was a French novel. He'd said French thoughts in English to the doctors. They had believed. Even Canadian men can have French minds.

"Yes. Well I see it all now. Mr. Mendizabal's vanity is his own affair. . . . I'm sure I hope they've all had an interesting summer. I'm awfully glad you've told me. It's most interesting."

"Well, I felt it was my duty to come up and tell you. I felt you ought to know."

"Yes . . . I'm awfully glad you've told me. It's like, er, a storm in a teacup."

“It’s not them I’m thinking of. Lot of low-minded gossips. That’s my opinion. It’s the harm they do I’m thinking of.”

“They can’t do any harm. As for the doctors they’re quite able to take care of themselves.” Miriam moved impatiently about the room. But she could not let herself look at her thoughts with Mrs. Bailey there.

“Well young lady,” murmured Mrs. Bailey dolorously at last, “I felt I couldn’t do less than come up, for my *own* satisfaction.”

She thinks I have made a scandal, without consulting her . . . . her mind flew, flaming, over the gossiping household, over Mrs. Bailey’s thoughts as she pondered the evidence. Wrenching away from the spectacle she entrenched herself far off ; clutching out towards the oblivion of the coming holidays ; a clamour came up from the street, the swaying tumult of a fire-engine, the thunder of galloping horses, the hoarse shouts of the firemen ; the outside life to which she went indifferent to any grouped faces of either of approval or of condemnation.

“I’m awfully sorry you’ve had all this, Mrs. Bailey.”

“Oh that’s nothing. It’s not that I think of.”

"Don't think about anything. It doesn't matter."

"Well I've got it off my mind now I've spoken."

"It *is* abominable isn't it. Never mind. I don't care. People are perfectly welcome to talk about me if it gives them any satisfaction."

"That is so. It's von Heber I'm so mad about."

"They're all alike as you say."

"He might have given you a chance."

Dr. von *Heber*; suddenly nearer than anyone. Her own man. By his own conviction. Found away here, at Mrs. Bailey's; Mrs. Bailey's regret measuring his absolute genuineness. Gone away. . . .

She steadied herself to say "Oh, if he's selfish."

"They're all that, every one of them. But we've all got to settle in life, sooner or later."

That was all, for Mrs. Bailey. She rallied woefully in the thought that Mrs. Bailey knew she could have settled in life if she had chosen.

Flickering faintly far away was something to be found behind all this, some silent thing she would find by herself if only Mrs. Bailey would go.

*Fascinated.* How did they find the word?

It was true ; and false. This was the way people talked. These were the true-false phrases used to sum up things for which there were no words.

They had no time. They were too busy. That was in the scheme. They were somehow prevented from doing anything. Dr. von Heber had been saved. The fascinating eyes and snorting smile had saved him ; coming out of space to tell him she was a flirt. He had boasted. She adore me ; hah ! I tell you she adore me, he would say. It was history repeating itself. Max and Ted. Again after all these years. *A few.*

## 2

The unconscious, inexorable ship . . . . . gliding across the Atlantic. They would take up their bright Canadian life again. England, a silent picture, fading. . . . . Dear Dr. von Heber. I owe it to myself just to inform you that the legend you heard about me was untrue. Wishing you a happy and prosperous career yours truly. That would be saying I, fool, have discovered too late that I was not clever enough to let you imagine that you were the only kind of man in the world . . . . . discreet women are sly. To get on in the world it is necessary to

be sly. Von Heber is sly. Careful and prudent and sly. What did genius Waynefflete think? Genius understands everything. Discreet proper clever women are open books to him. He will never marry. Whimsical old failure, Winchester, disappearing into British Columbia; failure; decorated in his evening conversations by having been to England. . . . . My dear von Heber, what the devil do you mean? When will you meet me? Choose your own weapons . . . . . that would be admitting not having the right to be as free and indiscreet as one choses . . . . . “a woman must march with her regiment; if she is wise she does”; something like that. If a woman is *sly* she marches with her regiment . . . . . all in agreement, being sly and discreet, helping each other. What for? What was the plot for? . . . . . there's a *word* . . . . . *coercion*, that's the word. Better any sort of free life.

If he could have *seen*. But then he would have seen those other moments too. Von Heber. Power and success. Never any moments like that. Divided life all the time *always*. So much for his profession, so much for her, outside it with the regiment of women. Proper men can't bring the



wild, gleaming . . . . . channel of flowers, pulling dragging to fling yourself headlong down it and awake, dead. Dead if you do. Dead if you don't. Now Tomlinson gave up the ghost.

## 3

"You're just in time." They had come back? He had come back for something?

"There's a surprise waiting for you upstairs"; *what* surprise Mrs. Bailey; how can you be happy and mysterious; cajoling to rush on into nothing, sweeping on, talking; "a friend of yorse; Dr. Winchester's room; she's longing to see you."

"Good heavens."

Miriam fled upstairs and tapped at the door of the room below her own. A smooth fluting thoughtful voice answered tranquilly from within the spaces of the room behind the closed door. There was no one with a voice like that to speak to intimately. It was a stranger, someone she had met somewhere and given the address to; a superior worldly person serenely answering the knock of a housemaid. She went in. Tall figure, tall skirt and blouse standing at the dressing-

table. The grime-screened saffron light fell on white hands pinning a skein of bright gold hair round the back of a small head. How do you do, Miriam announced, coming forward with obedient reluctance. The figure turned; a bent flushed face laughed from tumbled hair.

"'Ere I am dear; turned up like a bad penny. I'll shake 'ands in a minute." With compressed lips and bent frowning brow Miss Dear went on busily pinning. "Bother my silly hair," she went on with deepening flush, "I shall be able to talk to you in a minute."

Miriam clutched at the amazed resentment that flamed from her up and down the sudden calm unconscious facade reared between her and the demolished house, spread across the very room that had held the key to its destruction. She fought for annihilating words, but her voice had spoken ahead of her.

"*Eleanor!*"

With the word a soft beauty ran flickering, an edge of light about the form searched by her gazing eyes. Their shared past flowed in the room . . . . the skirt was a shabby thin blue serge, rubbed shiny, the skimpy cotton blouse had an ugly greyish stripe and badly cut shoulders,

one and eleven at an awful shop, but she was just going to speak.

"There that's better," she said lowering her hands to tweak at the blouse, her blue eyes set judiciously on the face of the important Duchesse mirror, her passing servant. "'Ow *are* you, dear?"

"*I'm* all right;" thrilled Miriam, "you're just in time for dinner."

"I am afraid I don't look very *dinnery*," frowned Miss Dear, fingering the loose unshapely collar of her blouse. "I wonder if you could let me have a tie, just for to-day, dear."

"I've got a lace one, but it's crumply," hazarded Miriam.

"I can manage it I daresay if you'd let me *avit*."

The gong sounded. "I shan't be a second," Miriam promised and fled. The little stair-flight and her landing, the sunset gilded spaces of her room flung her song out into the world. The tie was worse than she had thought, its middle length crushed and grubby. She hesitated over a card of small pearl-headed lace pins, newly bought and forgotten. For fourpence three farthings the twelve smooth filmy pearl heads, their bright

sharp-pointed gilt shanks pinned in a perfect even row through the neat oblong of the sheeny glazed card, lit up her drawer, bringing back the lace-hung aisles of the west-end shop, its counters spread with the fascinating details of the worldly life. The pins were the forefront of her armoury, still too blissfully new to be used. . . . However Eleanor arranged the tie she could not use more than three.

"Thank you dear," she said indifferently, as if they were her own things obligingly brought in, and swiftly pinned one end of the unexamined tie to her blouse collar. With lifted chin she deftly bound the lace round and round close to her neck each swathe firmly pinned, making a column wider than the width of the lace. Above her blouse, transformed by the disappearance of its ugly collar, her graceful neck went up, a column of filmy lace. Miriam watched, learning and amazed.

"That's better than nothing anyhow," said Miss Dear from her sideways movements of contemplation. Three or four small pearly heads gleamed mistily from the shapely column of lace. The glazed card lay on the dressing-table crumpled and rent and empty of all its pins.

## 4

The dining-room was a buzz of conversation. The table was packed save for two chairs on Mrs. Bailey's right hand. *Mrs. Bailey* was wearing a *black satin blouse* cut in a V and a piece of black ribbon-velvet tied round her neck! She was in conversation, preening and arching as she ladled out the soup, with a little *lady* and a big old *gentleman* with a patriarch beard sitting on her right bowing and smiling, personally, towards Miriam and Miss Dear as they took their seats. Miriam bowed and gazed as they went on talking. The old gentleman had a large oblong head above a large expensive spread of smooth well-cut black coat; a huge figure, sitting tall, with easily moving head reared high, massy grey hair; unspectacled smiling glistening eyes and oblong fresh cheeked face wreathed in smiles revealing gleaming squares of gold stopping in his front teeth. His voice was vast and silky, like the beard that moved as he spoke, shifting about on the serviette tucked by one corner into his neck. His little wife was like a kind bird, soft curtains of greying black hair crimping down from a beautifully twisted top-knot on either side of a

clear gentle forehead. Softly gleaming eyes shone through rimless pince-nez perched delicately on her delicate nose, no ugly straight bar, a little half-hoop to join them together and at the side a delicate gold chain tucked over one ear . . . . . she was about as old as mother had been . . . . . she was exactly like her . . . . . girlishly young, but untroubled; the little white ringed left hand with strange unfamiliarly expressive finger-tips and curiously mobile turned-back thumb-tip was herself in miniature. It held a little piece of bread, peaked, expressively, as she ate her soup. She was utterly familiar, no stranger; always known. Miriam adored, seeking her eyes till she looked, and meeting a gentle enveloping welcome, making no break in her continuous soft animation. The only strange thing was a curious *circular* sweep of her delicate jaw as she spoke; a sort of wide mouthing on some of her many quiet words, thrown in through and between and together with the louder easily audible silky tones of her husband. Mrs. Bailey sat unafraid, expanding in happiness. You *will* have a number of things to see she was saying. We are counting on this laddie to be our guide, said the old gentleman turning hugely to his further neighbour.

Miriam's eyes followed and met the face of Dr. Hurd . . . . . *grinning* ; his intensest brick-red grin. He had not gone ! These were his *parents*. *He* needs a holiday too, the dear lad, said the old gentleman laying a hand on his shoulder. Dr. Hurd grinned a rueful disclaimer with his eyes still on Miriam's and said I shan't be sorry, his face crinkling with his unexploded hysterically leaping laugh. Mrs. Hurd's smiling little face flickered with quickly smothered sadness. They had come all the way from Canada to share his triumph and were here smoothing his defeat . . . . . Canadian old people. A *Canadian* woman . . . . . that circular jaw movement was made by the Canadian vowels. They disturbed a woman's small mouth more than a man's. It must affect her thoughts, the held-open mouth ; *airing* them ; making them *circular*, sympathetically balanced, easier to go on from than the more narrowly mouthed English speech . . . . . Mr. Gunner, sitting beside your son is a violinist . . . . . Ah. We shall hope to hear him. Mr. Gunner, small and shyly smiling, next to him an *enormous* woman with a large school-girl face, fair straight and school-girl hair lifted in a flat wave from her broad forehead into an angry peak,

angrily eating with quickly moving brawny arms coming out of elbow sleeves with cheap cream lace frilling, reluctantly forced to flop against the brawny arms. Sallow good-looking husband, olive, furious, cocksure, bilious type, clubby and knowing, flat ignorance on the top of his unconscious shiny round black skull, both snatching at scraps of Scott and Sissie and Gunner chaff, trying to smile their way in to hide their fury with each other. Too poor to get further away from each other, accustomed to boarding house life, eating rapidly and looking for more. She had several brothers ; a short aristocratic upper lip and shapely scornful nostrils, brothers in the diplomatic service or the army. There was someone this side of the table they recognised as different and were watching ; a tall man beyond Mrs. Barrow, a strange *fine* voice with wandering protesting inflections ; speaking out into the world, with practised polished wandering inflections, like a tired pebble worn by the sea, going on and on, presenting the same worn wandering curves wherever it was, always a stranger everywhere, always anew presenting the strange wandering inflections ; indiscriminately. That end of the table was not aware of the Hurds.



Its group was wandering outside the warm glow of Canadian society. Eleanor Dear was feeling at its doors, pathetic-looking with delicate appealing head and thoughtful baby brow downcast. Us'll wander out this evening shall us, murmured Miriam in a lover-like undertone. It was a grimace at the wide-open door of Canadian life ; an ironic kick à la Harriet. Her heart beat recklessly round the certainty of writing and posting her letter. If he cared he would understand. Mrs. Hurd had come to show her Canadian society, brushing away the tangles and stains of accidental contacts ; putting everything right. Of course we will, bridled Miss Dear rebuking her vulgarity. Nothing mattered now but filling up the time.

The table was breaking up ; the Hurds retiring in a backward-turning group talking to Mrs. Bailey, towards the door. The others were standing about the room. The Hurds had gone. *Ob-no, that's all right, Mrs. Bailey ; I'll be all right.* It was the wandering voice. . . . It went on, up and down, the most curious different singing tones, the sentences beginning high and dropping low and ending on an even middle tone that sounded as if it were going on. It had a

meaning without the meaning of the words. Mrs. Bailey went on with some explanation and again the voice sent out its singing shape ; up and down and ending on a waiting tone. Miriam looked at the speaker ; a tall grey clad man, a thin pale absent-minded face, standing towards Mrs. Bailey, in a drooping lounge, giving her all his attention, several people were drifting out of the room, down-bent towards her small form ; Eleanor Dear was waiting, sitting docile, making no suggestion, just right, like a sister ; but his eyes never met Mrs. Bailey's ; they were fixed, burning, on something far away ; his thoughts were far away, on something that never moved. There was a loud rat-tat on the front door, more than a telegram and less than a caller ; a claim, familiar and peremptory. Mrs. Bailey looked sharply up. Sissie was ambling hurriedly out of the room. Oh *dear*, chirruped Eleanor softly, *someone* wants to come in. Well ; I'll say good-night, said the grey figure and turned easily with a curious waiting halting lounge, exactly like the voice, towards the door. It could stop easily, if anyone were coming in, and wander on again in an unbroken movement. The grey shoulders passing out through the door with the gaslight

on them had no look of going out of the room, desolate, they looked *desolate*. The room was almost empty. Mrs. Bailey was listening undisguisedly towards the hall. Sissie came in looking watchfully about. It's Mr. Rodkin, mother dear she said sullenly. *Rodkin?* 'Im? gasped Mrs. Bailey, transfigured. Can I come in? asked a deep hollow insinuating voice at the door, how do you do Mrs. Bailey? Mrs. Bailey had flung the door wide and was laughing and shaking hands heartily up and down with a small swarthy black moustached little man with an armful of newspapers and a top hat pushed back on his head. *Well*, he said uncovering a small bony sleek black head and sliding into a chair, his hat sticking out from the hand of the arm clasping the great bundle of newspapers. How *grand* you are. Moy word. What's the meaning of it? His teeth gleamed brilliantly. He had small high prominent cheek-bones, yellow beaten-in temples and a yellow hollow face; yet something almost dimpling about his smile. Aren't we? chuckled Mrs. Bailey taking his hat. Mr. Rodkin drew his hand over his face, yawning Well I've been *everywhere* since I left; *Moscow, Petersburg, Batoom, Harr-bin, everywhere*. Moy wort. Miss Sissie

you are a grown-up grand foine young lady. What is it all about? No joke; *tell* me I say. Mrs. Bailey sat at ease smiling triumphantly. A grand foine dinner. . . . Well you wouldn't have me *starve* my boarduz. *Boarders* murmured Mr. Rodkin, *My God*. He jerked his head back with a laugh and jerked it down again. Well its good business anyhow. *Bless* my heart! They talked familiarly on, two tired worn people in a little blaze of mutual congratulation. Mr. Rodkin had come to stay at once without going away. He noticed no one but the Baileys and questioned on and on yawning and laughing with sudden jerks of his head.

Coming back from sitting flirting with Eleanor at Donizetti's, Miriam wandered impatiently into the dark dining-room. Eleanor was not her guest. Why didn't she go up to her room and leave her to the dim street-lit dining-room and the nightly journey up through the darkness to her garret in freedom. Bed-time she hinted irritably, tugging at the tether. Bed-time echoed Eleanor, her smooth humouring nurse's voice bringing in her world of watchful diplomatic manœuvring, scattering the waiting population of the familiar dim room. I'm going to bed

stated Miriam advancing towards the windows. On the table under the window that was the most brightly lit by the street-lamps was a paper, a pamphlet . . . . . coloured ; blue. She took it up. It hung limply in her hand, the paper felt pitted and poor, like very thin blotting paper. *Young Ireland* she read printed in thick heavy black lettering across the top of the page. The words stirred her profoundly, calling to something far away within her, long ago. Underneath the thick words two short columns side by side began immediately. They went on for several pages and were followed by short paragraphs with headings ; she pressed close to the lit window, peering ; there were blotchy badly printed astericks between small groups of lines. Heavy black headings further on, like the title, but smaller, and followed by thick exclamation signs. It was a sort of little newspaper, the angry print too heavy for the thin paper. Green. It was green all through . . . . . *Ireland* ; home-rule. *I say* she exclaimed eagerly. That was the grey man. *Irish*. That's all going on still she said solicitously to a large audience. *What* dear asked Eleanor's figure close to her side. Ireland, breathed Miriam. We've got a home-ruler in

the house. Look at this; green all through. It's some propaganda, in London, very angry. I ope the home-ruler isn't green all through chuckled Eleanor smoothly. It's the wearin' o' the green scolded Miriam. The Emerald Isle. We're so stupid. An Irish girl I knew told me she 'just couldn't bear to face thinking' of the way we treat our children.

Leaving Eleanor abruptly in darkness in her bedroom she shut the door and stepped into freedom. The cistern gurgled from the upper dark freshness. Her world was uninvaded. Klah-rah *Buck*, in reverent unctuousness, waiting for responsive awe from those sitting round. He meant Clara Butt. Then she had been to Canada. He had expected . . . . Little Mrs. Hurd had sat birdlike at a Morning Musical hearing the sweep of the tremendous voice. I have never heard it, but I know how it rolls tremendously out and sweeps. I can hear it by its effect on them. They would not believe that. Rounding the sweep of the little staircase she was surprised by a light under the box-room door. Mrs. Bailey, at midnight, busy in the little box-room? How could she find room to have the door shut? Her garret felt fresh and free. Summer rain

pattering on the roof in the darkness. The *Colonisation of Ulster*. Her mind turned the pages of a school essay, page after page, no red-ink corrections, the last page galloping along one long sentence; "until England shall have recognised her cruel folly." 10; *excellent*, E.B.R. A fraud and yet not a fraud. Never having thought of Ireland before reading it up in Green, and then some strange indignation and certainty, coming suddenly while writing; there for always. I had forgotten about it. A man's throat was cleared in the box-room. The tone of the wandering voice. . . . Mrs. Bailey had screwed him into that tiny hole. *I'll be all right*. . . . What a shame. He must not know anyone knew he was there. He did not know he was the first to disturb the top landing. . . . He did not disturb it. There were no English thoughts in there, nothing of the downstairs house. Julia Doyle, Dublin Bay, *Clontarf*; fury underneath, despairing of understanding, *showing* how the English understood nothing, themselves nor anyone else. But the Irish were not people . . . they did not care for *anything*. Meredith was partly Celtic. *That* was why his writing always felt to be pointing in some invisible direction. He

wrote so much because he did not care about anything. Novelists were angry men lost in a fog. But how did they find out how to do it? Brain. Frontal development. But it was not certain that that was not just the extra piece wanted to control the bigger muscular system. Sacrificed to muscle. Going about with more muscles and a bit more brain, if *size* means *more*, doing all kinds of different *set* pieces of work in the world, each in a space full of problems none of them could agree about.

## 5

“*Gracious.* You’ll ave to be up early in the morning to say all those names dear.”



## CHAPTER X

ELEANOR'S cab rumbled away round the corner. Mrs. Bailey was still standing at the top of the steps. Miriam ran up the steps looking busily ahead. It's going to be a lovely evening she said as she passed Mrs. Bailey. She was safely in the hall. But the front door was closed and Mrs. Bailey was in the hall just behind her. She turned abruptly, almost colliding with her, into the dining-room. Mrs. Bailey's presence was there waiting for her in the empty room. Behind her just inside the door was Mrs. Bailey, blocking the way to the untrammelled house. There's quite a lot of August left she quoted from the thoughts that had poured down to meet her as she stood facing the stairs. The clock on the mantelpiece was telling the time of Mrs. Bailey's day. The empty room was waiting for the next event, a spread meal, voices sounding towards a centre, distracting attention from its increasing shabbiness . . . . . there was never *long* for it

to remain sounding its shabbiness, the sound of dust, into the empty space. Events going on and on, giving no time to get in, behind the dusty shabbiness to the sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing. . . . .

“What a jolly big room this *is*, isn’t it?” she demanded, turning towards Mrs. Bailey’s shapely skimpy form. Mrs. Bailey knew she was chafing in the airless shabby room. The windows closed to keep the dust *out* made the dust *smell*.

“Isn’t it?” agreed Mrs. Bailey cordially.

“You *must* have been glad to get rid of the lodgers and have possession of the whole house.”

“Yes” said Mrs. Bailey straightening the sideboard cloth.

Hearty agreement about the advantages and disadvantages of boarders and then, I think it’s very *plucky* of you and away upstairs. A few words about the interest of having boarders to begin getting to the door with.

“The Irishman’s an interesting specimen of humanity.”

“Isn’t he interesting,” laughed Mrs. Bailey moving further into the room.

“It’s much more interesting to have boarders than lodgers” said Miriam moving along the

pathway of freedom towards the open door. Mrs. Bailey stood silent, watching politely. There was no way out. Mrs. Bailey's presence would be waiting in the hall, and upstairs, unappeased. Miriam glanced towards her without meeting her eyes and sat limply down on the nearest chair.

"Phoo — it's rather a relief," she murmured.

Mrs. Bailey went briskly to the door and closed it and came freely back into the room, a little exacting figure who had seen all her selfish rejoicing. She would get up now and walk about the room, talking easily and eloquently about Eleanor's charm and go away leaving Mrs. Bailey mystified and disposed of.

"My *word*" declared Mrs. Bailey tweaking the window curtains. Then Mrs. Bailey *was* ready and anxious to talk her over and impart her opinion. After seeming to like her so much and being so attentive and sending her off so gaily and kindly, she had some grievance. It was not the bill. It was a matter of opinion. Mrs. Bailey had been charmed and had yet seen through her. Seen what? What was the everlasting secret of Eleanor? She imagined them standing talking together, politely, and joking and laughing. Mrs.

Bailey would like Eleanor's jokes ; they would be in agreement with her own opinions about things. But she had formed some idea of her and was ready to express it. If it explained anything one would have to accept it, from Mrs. Bailey. To make nice general remarks about her and enquire insincerely about the bill would be never to get Mrs. Bailey's uninfluenced opinion. She would not give it unless she were asked.

" I'm awfully sorry for her," she said in Eve's voice. That would mean just her poverty and her few clothes and delicate health. There could be an insincere discussion. It might end in nothing and the mean selfish joy would still be waiting upstairs as soon as one had forgotten that it was mean and selfish.

" So am I " said Mrs. Bailey heartily. There was anger in her face. There really *was* something, some really bad opinion about Eleanor. Mrs. Bailey thought these things more important than joyful freedom. She was one of those people who would do things ; then there were other people too ; then one need not trouble about what it was or warn people against Eleanor. The world would find out and protect itself, passing her on. If Mrs. Bailey felt there was something wrong, no

one need feel blamed for thinking so. There was. *What* was it ?

"I'm the last to be down on anyone in difficulties" said Mrs. Bailey.

"Oh yes." It was coming.

"It's the *way* of people *I* look to. She stopped. If she were not pressed she would say no more.

"Oh, by the way, Mrs. Bailey, has her bill been settled?" The voice of Mrs. Lionel . . . . she's unsquashable my dear, absolutely unsquashable. You never saw *anything* like it in your *life*. But she's done frerself in Weston. It might finish the talk.

"That's all in order young lady. It's not that at all."

"Oh, I know. I'm glad though."

"I had my own suspicions before you told me you'd be responsible. I never thought about that."

"No, I see."

"It's the *way* of people."

"Well you know I told you at once that you must have her here at your own risk after the first week, and that I hardly knew anything about her." If she had paid the two weeks so easily perhaps

Mr. Taunton was still looking after her needs. No. She would have mentioned him. He had dropped her entirely ; after all he had said.

“ I’m not blaming you, young lady.” Perhaps Mrs. Bailey had offered advice and been rebuffed in some way. There would be some mysterious description of character ; like the Norwegian . . . . ‘ selfish in a way I couldn’t describe to you ’ . . . .

“ If I’d known what it was going to be I’d not have had her in the house two days.”

. . . . . some man . . . . who ? . . . . but they were out all day and Eleanor had been with her every evening. Besides Mrs. Bailey would sympathise with that. . . . She was furiously angry ; “ not two days.” But she *had* been charmed. Charmed and admiring.

“ Did she flirt with some one ? ”

“ That ” said Mrs. Bailey gravely, “ I can’t tell you. She may have ; that’s her own affair. I wouldn’t necessary blame her. Everyone’s free to do as they like provided they behave theirselves.” Mrs. Bailey was brushing at her skirt with downcast eyes.

. . . . . This woman had opened Dr. von Heber’s letter ; knew he was coming next year ;

knew that he "would not have permitted" any talk at all, and that all her interference was meaningless. *He* was coming, carrying his suitcase out of the hospital, no need for the smart educated Canadian nurses to think about him . . . . . taking ship . . . . . coming back. Perhaps she resented having been in the wrong.

"It was funny how she found a case so suddenly," said Miriam drawing herself upright, careless, like a tree in the wind. She had already forgotten she would always feel like that, her bearing altered for ever, held up by him, like a tree in the wind, everyone powerless to embarrass her. Poor Mrs. Bailey. . . .

"You see I feel I drove her to it, in a way."

Mrs. Bailey listened smiling keenly.

"Yes you *see*" pursued Miriam cheerfully, "I told her she would be all right for a week. I blamed *you* for that, said you were flourishing and she could pay when her ship came home."

"That's what you told her eh?"

"Well and then when she admitted she had no money and I knew I couldn't manage more than a week, I advised her to apply to the C.O.S. She said she would and seemed delighted and when I asked her about it later she cried and said she

hadn't been. I said she must do *something* and then suddenly this case appeared. *Where* I don't know."

"I don't blame her for not wanting to go *there*."

"Why?"

"My word. I'd as soon go straight to the parish."

"Wilberforce believes in them. He says if you really want to help the helpless you will not flaunt your name in subscription lists but hand your money over to the C.O.S. They are the only charitable organization that does not pauperise."

"Him? Wilberforce? He has a right to his own opinions I don't deny. But if he'd ever been in difficulties he might change them. *Insulting*, that's my opinion. My word the *questions* they ask. You can't call your soul your own."

"I didn't know that. That friend my sister brought here was being helped by them."

"How is Miss Henderson?"

"Perfectly happy. Being with the Greens again seems *Paradise* she says, after London. She's satisfied now."



"Mts. She's a sweet young lady; them's fortunate as have her."

"Well now she's tried something else she appreciates the beautiful home. I don't think she wants to be free."

"Quite so. Persons differ. But she's her own mistress; free to leave."

"Of course it's nicer now. The children are at school. She's confidential companion. They all like her so much. They invented it for her."

"Quite right. That's as it should be."

"And she is absolutely in Mrs. Green's confidence now. I don't know what poor Mrs. Green would do without her. She went back just in time for a most *fearful* tragedy."

"Tss; dear — *dear*" murmured Mrs. Bailey waiting with frowning calm eagerness. Miriam hesitated. It would be a long difficult story to make Mrs. Bailey see stupid commercial wealth. She would see wealthy "people," a "gentleman" living in a large country house, and not understand Mr. Green at all; but *Eve*, getting the bunch of keys from the ironmonger's and writing to Bennett to find out about Rupert Street . . . and the *detective*. She would have it in her mind like a novel and never let it go. It would be a

breach of confidence. . . . . She paused, not knowing what to do with her sudden animation. It was too late to get back into being an impartial listener, on the verge of going away. She had told everything, without the interesting details. Mrs. Bailey was waiting for them. They were still safe. She might think it was an illness or something about a relative. The only thing to do now was to stay and work off the unexplained animation on anything Mrs. Bailey might choose to say. "Well" said Mrs. Bailey presently, "to return to our friend. What I say is, why doesn't she go to the clergy, in her own parish?"

"Go on the parish, m'm."

"Not necessarily on the parish. The clergy's most helpful and sympathetic. They might tell her of those who would help her."

"They might. But it's most awfully difficult. *Nobody* knows what ought to be done about these things."

"That is so. But there's a right and a wrong in everything. There's plenty of people willing to help those that will help themselves. But that's very different to coming into a person's house to try and get money out of strangers."

"I say."

"It is I *say*. I never felt so ashamed in my life."

"I *say*. . . . Did they tell you?"

"Mrs. Hurd came to me herself."

"Mrs. Hurd. Of course, it would be."

"My word. I *was* wild. And them only just come into my house."

"Yes, of course; I *say*."

"Tellin' them she was *ill*."

"She is ill you know."

"There's some imagines theirselves ill. If she was anything like as ill as I am she might have something to complain about."

"I think she's rather plucky. She doesn't want to give in. It's a kind of illness that doesn't show much. I know her doctor. He's a Harley Street man. *He* says that her kind of disorder makes it absolutely impossible for the patient to tell the truth. I don't believe that. It's just one of those doctory things they all repeat." . . . What is truth said jesting Pilate and did not wait for an answer. *Their* idea of truth —

"Well if she is ill why doesn't she act accordingly?"

"Look *after* herself a bit. Yes. That's what she wants to do. But not give in."

"Quite so. That's a thing a person can understand. But that doesn't make it right to come to private people and behave in the way she has done. Strangers. I never met such conduct, nor heard of it."

"No."

"She's got relatives I suppose ; or friends."

"Well, that's just it. I don't think she has. I suppose the truth is all her friends are tired of helping her."

"Well, I'm not judging her there. There's none can be so cruel as relatives, as *I* know, my word."

"Yes."

"They'll turn from you when you're struggling to the utmost to help yourself, going on ill, left with four young children. your husband cut off and not a *penny*."

"Yes."

"I agree with her there. I owe all I have, under Providence, to my own hands and the help coming from strangers I had no claim on. But why doesn't she act open ? That's what *I* say and I know it. There's always those ready to help you if you'll do your part. It's all take and no give with some."

"Vampires. People *are* extraordinary."

"You'd say so if you had this house to manage."

"I suppose so."

"You get your eyes open. With one and another."

"I'd no idea she'd even been talking to the Hurds."

"Talk? Well I don't mind telling you now she's gone."

"Well, she won't come back again. If she ever does Mrs. Bailey I hereby refuse all responsibility. On your head be it if you take her in. I can't keep her."

"Well, as I say, I'm free to tell you. They used to go upstairs into the drawn-room, mornings, after breakfast. I could hear that woman's voice going on and on. I was up and down the stairs. What's more she used to stop dead the minute I came in."

"Well I am sorry you've had all this."

"I'm not blaming you, young lady."

"What about all the others?"

"Rodkin and Helsing's and Gunners out all day."

"Yes but the others? The Manns and the Irish journalist."

"She'd be clever to get anything out of any of *them*."

"I wonder she didn't try Mrs. Barrow. She's kind I'm sure and gullible."

"She's very kind no doubt in her way. Anyway she's not one of those who live on a widow woman and pay nothing."

The old sense of the house was crumbling. To Mrs. Bailey it was *worry* and things she could not talk about to anyone, and a few nice people here and there. And all the time she was *polite*; as if she liked them all, equally. And they were polite. Everyone was polite. And behind it was all this. Shifts and secrets and strange characters. When they were all together at Mrs. Bailey's dinner, they were all carrying things off, politely. Perhaps already she regretted having sent away the lodgers.

"The doctors were nice people to have in the house."

"Wasn't they dear boys? *Very* nice gentlemen. Canadians are the ones to my mind, though I believe as much as any in standing by your own. But you've got to consider your interests."

"Of course."

"That's why I mean to *advertiss*. My word

those Hurds are good friends if you like. I couldn't tell you. The old man's put an advert for me in the Canadian place in the city."

"Then you'll have a houseful of Canadians."

"That's what I *hope*. The more the better of their kind."

"We shall all be speaking Canadian."

"Well, since we're on the subject, Mrs. Hurd advises me to *go* to Canada. Says it's all work and no pay over here. Everybody expects too much for too little."

How *could* she rejoice in the idea of a house full of Canadians? All the same. Canadian. It would change the house more and more. Mrs. Bailey would not mind that. The house meant nothing to her just as it was with its effect. She had to make it pay. If another house would pay better she would just as soon have another house. "You wouldn't like to leave London; there's no place like London." The Hurds thought everyone in the house *selfish*, living on Mrs. Bailey's work, enjoying the house for nothing, forgetting her. It was true . . . uneasy in her presence. . . .

## CHAPTER XI

MIRIAM got up early the next morning and went to her window in her nightgown. There was a thick August haze in the square. The air smelt moist. She leaned out into the chill of it. Her body was full of sleep and strength ; all one strength from head to feet. She heard life in the silence, and went through her getting up as quickly as possible, listening all the time to the fresh silence.

She went downstairs feeling like a balloon on a string ; her feet touching the stairs lightly as if there were no weight in her body. At the end of the long journey came the smiling familiar surprise of the hall. The hall-table was clear, a stretch of grey marble in the morning light. The letters had been taken into the dining-room. There was something, a package, on the far corner, a book package, with a note, Silurian blue, *Eleanor*. Small straggly round handwriting, yes, Eleanor's, *R. Rodkin, Esq : Ab. Mr. Rodkin*. How had



she done it? When? Carrying off a book. Pretending she had forgotten, and writing. Sly cleverness. What a blessing she had gone. . . . Booming through her uneasiness came a great voice from the dining-room. Through the misty corridors of the *Dawn* it bellowed. She went gladly in towards poetry. Mrs. Bailey was presiding over an early breakfast. The Irishman, sitting back mirthfully in his chair on the far side of the table and at his side a big stout man with a bushy black beard, brilliant laughing eyes staring at nothing from a flushed face. Mrs. Bailey was watching him with a polite smile; he looked as though he were at supper; making the room seem hot, obliterating the time of day. I expect you had a rough crossing, she said politely. I *saw* her, he bellowed flinging back his head and roaring out words and laughter together. She walks in *Beauty*. I saw her sandalled feet; upon the *Hills*.

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